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SIR EVELYN'S
OR CHARGE
A CHILD'S INFLUENCE



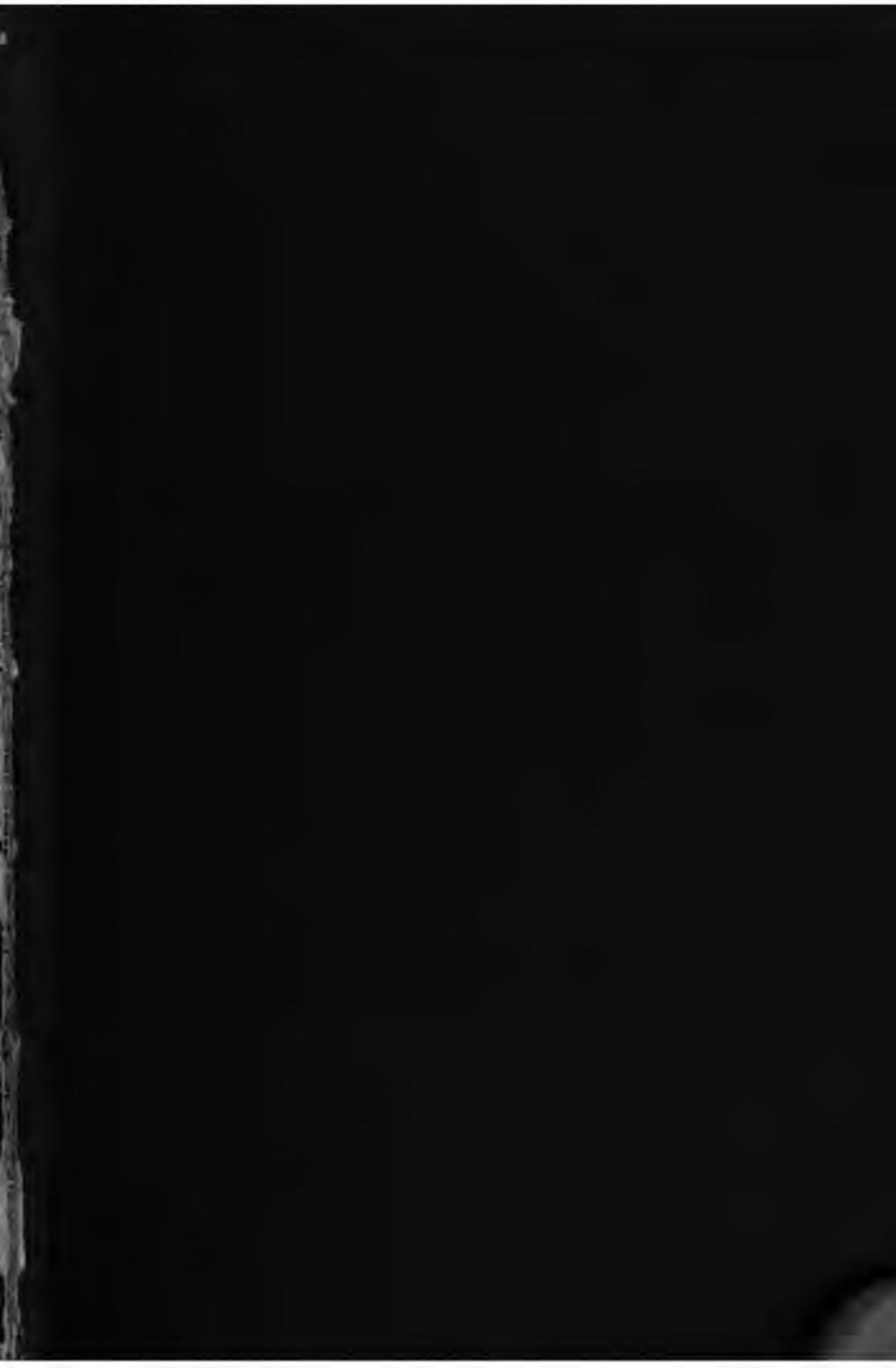


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SIR EVELYN'S CHARGE.

Frontispiece.

SIR EVELYN'S CHARGE;

OR,

A CHILD'S INFLUENCE.

BY

M. I. A.



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P R E F A C E.

THE simple object of the following pages is to show the quiet unconscious influence for good that even a child may exert over those around him, without ostentation or needless display.

They may serve, too, to remind those who are called to the holy work of training up the "little ones," that "tenderness is to them what sunshine is to the flowers," and that love, not fear, is the secret of success.

SIR EVELYN'S CHARGE.

CHAPTER I.

“There’s a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them as we may.”

“OH, mother, come and listen to the bells!” exclaimed Annie Foster, one of the blithest of Alliston village maidens, as she stood in the ivy-covered porch of her father’s cottage home. “They must be coming now!” The mother came, work in hand; but before she could reply, a handsome travelling carriage dashed past, the young occupants bowing and acknowledging the hearty greetings that on all sides welcomed them.

It was indeed a bright day for Alliston, for the youthful owner of the noble house bearing his name was bringing home his bride.

Sir Hugh Alliston had done wisely when he wooed and won the Lady Maud Liscombe. Nobly born, intellectual, refined, she was her husband’s companion in all ways, and her rare loveliness long made her remembered as “the beautiful Lady Alliston.” One son was the issue of this marriage. He received the

name of Evelyn, after Lady Maud's father. In looks he much resembled her, with her dark grey eyes and the handsome features that belonged to all the Liscombes; but he inherited his father's hasty and somewhat passionate temper, and this caused his gentle mother many an hour of anxiety and uneasiness, though his disposition was at the same time so noble and generous that it was impossible not to hope that in time he might become all that her earnest prayers and longings desired her boy might be. But like most other high-spirited lads, he grew up comparatively thoughtless and careless; though these early lessons sank into his heart, and long after, when that beloved mother was lying low in the grave, they bore their precious fruit.

Evelyn's attachment to his mother was unbounded: he thought no one could be so true and good and beautiful as she; and the happiest hours of his vacations were those spent with her in her own favourite room, where he would recount to her all his boyish tales, his hopes and ambitions, and listen to the gentle words and loving counsels that from other lips he could never have again! His father was extremely proud and fond of his son. Under his tuition Evelyn became a proficient in riding, shooting, hunting, etc.; and so his young life passed joyously on. But when he was about fourteen, a change came. He had just returned to Eton after the midsummer vacation, when the master of the house in which he boarded called him one morning into his private room: he looked very grave; but little the boy guessed what was to come. As gently as possible he unfolded to him the news that had just arrived from Alliston, and which he was

commissioned to break to him. His mother, while riding with her husband, had been thrown from her horse, and so severely injured that but the faintest hopes remained of her recovery; and Evelyn was to return immediately. He seemed at first completely stunned; but as the dreadful possibility came over him he burst into a passion of tears. "Poor fellow," said his master, kindly; "this is terrible! But you may find things better than you expect: who can tell?" Evelyn tried to thank him, and struggled hard to regain his self-command. In a few minutes he had made his hurried preparations and was on his way to Alliston. We will pass over his arrival there, and his bitter uncontrollable grief when he found that he was too late,—that his beloved, his idolized mother, had already breathed her last. Sir Hugh was, as may be supposed, perfectly overwhelmed: the blow had fallen so suddenly, so unexpectedly. The very sight of his boy seemed but to add to his distress. And in a little time Evelyn was standing by the lifeless form of her who had been such a tender mother to him. There she lay in all the calm majesty of death: her beautiful features looking like marble in their chiselled purity.

All description of sorrow such as this is needless; only those who have passed through the same can enter into its full intensity. Then came the solemn pomp and pageantry of the funeral, and Lady Maud was carried from her stately home to the quiet resting-place of her husband's kindred, and the waves of daily life flowed back again; but never more was Alliston the same to Sir Hugh. Her voice, her step, her sweet presence were missing everywhere, and at last he was persuaded to leave for a time the scene of his great

sorrow, and try the effect of Continental travel and complete change, for a time. At first he thought of taking Evelyn with him; but as he was in the middle of his school term, he felt it would be unwise to interrupt it: and the boy himself seemed quite passive. His heart was yet in his mother's grave: he could not rouse himself to take interest in anything. So Alliston Hall was shut up, only a few old servants remaining to take care of it.

Christmas came round, but Sir Hugh was still away, and Evelyn with his uncle, Lord Liscombe, at his seat in Hampshire. Silence and darkness now reigned in the deserted rooms, where but one short year ago Lady Maud moved among her guests, the fairest of the fair, endearing herself to all by her gentle grace and true-hearted courtesy.

Evelyn remained with his uncle for the whole of the vacation. Lady Liscombe had been his mother's earliest and most intimate friend. Her own children were quite young, and she fondly watched over the brave, handsome, affectionate lad, who was her companion in everything, and extremely attached to her, but whose occasional bursts of passionate grief, as some chance word or gesture recalled the mother he had so loved and lost, showed that to him her place could never be taken by another.

In due time he returned to Eton, and at midsummer was to rejoin his father at Alliston. It was with very mingled feelings that he prepared for this journey home. He knew how that one shadow would be over all: but little he guessed what now awaited him! Almost immediately after Sir Hugh had left the Continent, he received a letter from his half sister, Lady

Cairne, a widow with one child, offering to come and stay with him for a while. Her daughter was at school, and her own life was solitary, and she should rejoice if she could in any measure devote herself to him and solace his loneliness. Now though we would not for a moment question the sincerity of Lady Cairne's motives, it must be confessed that Alliston was a decidedly more pleasant residence than her own small house in Bath. Her daughter Laura, too, might spend some of her holidays with her there; and if ulterior views of the possible future of that young lady (who was only a year or so younger than Evelyn) floated through her busy scheming brain, who can blame her? At any rate she succeeded in her present plans.

Sir Hugh felt how unequal he was to direct the internal arrangements of a household like Alliston, and without giving himself much time to consider the possible result, he wrote and accepted his sister's offer. When Evelyn therefore returned home he found Lady Cairne regularly installed as mistress there, and bitterly he soon felt what a changed place it was to him. Many of the old servants had left, and were replaced by others of her choosing; for those who had lived under Lady Maud's beloved and gentle sway could ill brook the treatment to which they had now to submit. Mrs. Humphreys, the housekeeper, was one of the few who retained her place. Here Lady Cairne knew her brother would be invulnerable, that none of the clever pretexts invented for the removal of other familiar faces would avail here, especially as Evelyn was her staunch friend and ally. He loved to talk to her of his mother and of the bright old days that would never come again, and she in her turn felt willing to endure anything

rather than be parted from her "own boy," as she used fondly to call him. Laura Cairne came to Alliston as her mother had planned, and spent most of her holidays there. The cousins were thrown much together, and her ladyship inwardly rejoiced at the success of her scheme so far.

The years passed on: Evelyn went from Eton to Sandhurst,—for it was his own great wish to enter the army, and keenly as his father felt the separation, he was too wise to wish him, for his sake, to lead an idle life at home. At the age of eighteen he joined. Then came the farewell visit home, for his regiment was ordered abroad immediately. One day he dressed in his new uniform to show them; and well might Sir Hugh be pardoned for a little fatherly pride, as he stood before him in the handsome pelisse of the Rifle Brigade: his dark eyes full of youthful fire, and his tall slight form, looking every inch a soldier. The house seemed very still and strange when he was gone. For a long time after Sir Hugh seemed graver and more depressed than ever. But a most unexpected event was at hand. It happened one evening that he was riding leisurely along the road that led from the little sea-side town of Rockwood to Alliston, taking little note, however, of the fair sweet country he was passing through,—when a footstep startled him. It was a lonely part of the road, and he looked up suddenly. A pair of blue eyes met his for a moment, and were as quickly withdrawn. Sir Hugh gazed intently,—almost unconsciously: something in the features of the girl (for she seemed hardly more to him) attracted him irresistibly; but in another moment she was gone. As he rode on he could not help speculating as to who she

could be; and why she was so far on that lonely road at that time, and alone too.

At a sudden turn of the road there came in sight a dark ruffianly-looking fellow, walking rapidly in the direction of Rockwood. He had one or two fierce surly curs with him; but he called them off, angrily, as they approached Sir Hugh's dogs, and passed on with a down sort of look from under his shaggy brows, neglecting the usual courtesy that even strangers were wont to accord to the fine form and gentlemanlike bearing of Sir Hugh Alliston. The latter rode on a few paces when a sudden thought struck him. He reined in his horse, and called to his servant, who was instantly at his side. "Stevens, that was an ill-looking fellow we met just now. No one belonging to any of our people?"

"No, Sir Hugh: I don't know him at all. But he might be a poacher with all those dogs: there have been a great many about lately."

"Exactly so: and yet I have a fancy that I have seen him before! I wish you would go back to the turn and see if he has passed that young lady we met just now: he might alarm her if she is alone in that dark bit of road."

Stevens obeyed: and after looking for a minute, spurred quickly on in the direction the man had taken. Sir Hugh followed, and was just in time to prevent his taking the girl's watch from her, as well as some money which she had given him in sheer despair. The moment he caught sight of Sir Hugh he darted off, and was quickly out of sight; but not before the latter had recognised him as a poacher, who had been brought before him a few weeks since as one of the most daring

of his lawless set. He certainly would not have lost sight of him now, but that his attention was fully engrossed with the young stranger, who, as may be supposed, had been extremely alarmed. He insisted on seeing her safely back to Rockwood: Stevens following at a little distance with the horses. He found that she was staying with her married sister and her husband, and had set out to meet them as they returned from a walk, but, supposing she must have missed them, had turned back alone. There was something inexpressibly pleasing to Sir Hugh in her frank simplicity; he conducted her to the very door of the house, and then took his leave, saying he must do himself the pleasure of calling the next day to know that she was none the worse for her adventure. He thought much of this strange rencontre, and casually mentioned it to Lady Cairne, though he did not go into any details with her.

"Oh, I dare say they are some of the regular Rockwood frequenters!" she replied carelessly. "But why you should take the trouble to call upon them, Hugh, I really cannot imagine: if you once begin this sort of thing there will be no end to it."

Sir Hugh did call notwithstanding, and was even more struck with the beauty and grace of his unknown friend than before. He was nearly as much prepossessed by her sister, Mrs. Forsyth, who with her husband joined in thanking him for his kindness to her. He found that they were just returning to Scotland, and that Miss Grey was to rejoin the aunt with whom she now lived in London. She had been latterly in rather delicate health, and when her only sister married, had come to spend the last week of the honeymoon with them at Rockwood: for Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth were bride and bridegroom,

though it would hardly have been thought so. She was fair and young looking, like her sister, while he was beginning to show "silver threads" in his dark hair, and had lads and lassies—the children of a former marriage—nearly as tall as she, in the distant Highland manse to which he was taking her.

How desolate Helen Grey felt at the thought of the separation; but she tried to keep up her spirits, that their last hours together might be unclouded. Scarcely a day passed now that Sir Hugh did not see them: the manly straightforwardness of Mr. Forsyth greatly attracted him, to say nothing of other attractions that were beginning to exert a singular influence over him. Beautiful presents of flowers and fruit constantly found their way from Alliston Park to the quiet little drawing-room at Rockwood. At length the day of their departure came. Sir Hugh mentioned it at the breakfast table, and Lady Cairne experienced a decided sensation of relief. He had been very reticent with her on the subject all along, but she had not been quite easy, and was truly glad to find that they were really going. She made no inquiries however, affecting to consider their go or stay a matter of perfect indifference to her, and only supposed that they had all left for Scotland. When Sir Hugh a few days afterwards announced his intention of going to London, her suspicions were not in the least aroused: her feelings therefore may be imagined, when about a week later she received a letter, telling her of his engagement to Miss Grey, and their intention of being married almost immediately! Bitterly she blamed her own folly in not being, as she termed it, more quick-sighted, and her own supineness in not endeavouring more vigorously to stop this intimacy. However, regrets

were useless now, and she was too wise to allow her real feelings to transpire. While expressing her congratulations to her brother, she at the same time "hoped that he would never have cause to regret the transfer of his household from one who had so carefully studied his interests, to an inexperienced wife, however well-intentioned she might be." She wished to know how soon she should leave Alliston, and ended by supposing that he had informed her poor Evelyn of the change that "he would naturally feel so much." Sir Hugh replied that she need not hurry her movements, as they would be abroad several months: adding that he had written to his son, who he knew would have but one feeling on the subject. So in due time Lady Cairne departed with all her belongings, relinquishing with evident chargin the reins she had held so long; and the household of Alliston awaited with some anxiety the arrival of their new sovereign.

CHAPTER II.

“The flower fadeth.”

THE wedding took place in London, the last week in April, then came a Continental tour; and just when Alliston was in all the radiance of its summer beauty, Sir Hugh brought home his bride. It was a different life that she was leading now to what Helen Grey had been accustomed. She had known what it was to struggle with almost poverty, and latterly had been treated with coldness and neglect by the relations with whom she had lived since her mother's death. Now all was changed. The magnificent mansion she called “home,”—the unbounded wealth displayed in the perfect appointments of everything within and without,—above all, her husband's unceasing love and care, did indeed alter the whole texture of her life. But she was not spoiled: she was too pure, too guileless for that, and she kept her gentle simplicity unchanged. Very sweet and unclouded were those first months of their married life. To Sir Hugh it almost seemed as if the old brightness of former days had returned; for though his inmost heart was still true to the memory of the wife of his youth, he felt that he could never be grateful enough for this bright sunshine that heaven itself had shed over his lonely life. He had kept back nothing from her. She knew how beautiful and beloved the young

Lady Maud had been, and as she gazed upon her picture, and thought how she had been cut off in the midst of her youth and joy, she yearned to know her child, and to endeavour in some measure to supply her place to him. The year passed on, and Sir Hugh's tender solicitude increased, if increase were possible, for her naturally delicate health made the event, which was ere long expected, an anxious time for all. It came at last, and Lady Alliston gave birth to a son. All went on satisfactorily, and Sir Hugh was full of joy: but the infant was delicate, and it was thought desirable to have it baptized as soon as possible. So Mr. Randolph, the just-appointed Rector of Alliston, was summoned; and then Sir Hugh went softly into the room where the young mother lay, to ask what was to be done about the name.

“Wilfrid,” she murmured, looking up at her husband as he bent over her: “that was my only little brother's name. And Hugh,” she added, “let him be called by your name too.”

So the child received the two names of his mother's choosing: but as Mr. Randolph took him in his arms, he thought it would not be for long that he would have to buffet with the “waves and storms” of this troublesome world, so fragile seemed the thread of his little life. How seldom can the most far-seeing among us tell of what is to come! The child seemed to thrive, while the fair young wife, the cherished, the beloved of all, slowly but surely was fading away. At first Sir Hugh refused to believe it: he *would* not see that there was any cause for alarm. All that the best medical skill, and the tenderest care could devise, was lavished upon her: but the fiat had gone forth,—he knew at last

that all was in vain. Yet all was calmness and peace with the gentle spirit that was passing: she had not left the making of her peace with God to a dying hour, and now at eventide her sun shone brightly, her trust in her Redeemer was firm and unshaken: the only cloud that overshadowed her was the sight of her husband's grief. Tenderly she strove to comfort him, and to direct his thoughts to that bright home where she was hastening. But soon it was all over: she passed away with the early snowdrops, and the joy of his life seemed to depart with her. He refused to be comforted: old age prematurely crept over him; he was seldom, if ever seen to smile. Evelyn wrote at once, offering to give up his profession and come home; but his father would not hear of it. "No, my boy," he wrote, "I would not exact such a sacrifice from you: I rejoice to know that you are doing your duty to your Queen and country, and winning your spurs bravely." It had been young Lady Alliston's dying wish that her baby should for the present be placed under her sister's care, for she knew how tenderly she would watch over him for her sake. So Sir Hugh wrote to Mrs. Forsyth; and ere long she had taken the child back to her Highland home, and silence and gloom once more settled down over Alliston Hall. He was one day sitting alone in the library, when there came a sound of wheels outside. In a few minutes the door opened, and Lady Cairne herself walked in. She expressed the greatest joy at seeing him again, though, as she plaintively added, under such sad and altered circumstances. "Do not think I wish to intrude, my dear brother; but perhaps if I were to remain a week or so with you it might cheer you a little: it is so very hard for you to be alone!" Sir Hugh acquiesced pas-

sively: solitude was pleasantest to him just now; but he could not bring himself to say so, and Lady Cairne quietly re-established herself. She talked of going, but somehow she never did. The week stretched into a month, and that into another and another, as if that one bright, beautiful episode had never varied the old routine of Sir Hugh's sad life.

The change was keenly felt by the whole household; but no one liked to complain to him: the only comfort seemed to be in the thought that things could not go on so for ever, and that when Mr. Evelyn came home again all would be right. Years, however, had to pass before that; and Sir Hugh gradually became more and more of an invalid, though he steadily refused to have Evelyn sent for. At last the regiment was ordered home: and who could imagine the father's joy when he could really give himself leave to expect his son, his treasure, his all as it seemed to him; for of his other son—his little Willy, he had not seen much yet: his journeys to Scotland had not been very frequent lately.

He came at last: but it was difficult to recognise in the tall soldier-like man, the bright-faced lad of eighteen who had left them just seven years ago. Fondly his father traced again in his handsome features the likeness of her he had so deeply loved, and with the greatest interest entered into his glowing descriptions of the service he had seen and the laurels he had won.

As to Mrs. Humphreys she could hardly believe her eyes; but when he greeted her again in his old boyish fashion, and she felt it was indeed her own "master Evelyn" come back, her delight was as great as Sir Hugh's himself: she evidently thought that nothing in the house, or in the kingdom either, was too good for

her darling. Laura received her cousin with evident pleasure, and Lady Cairne *appeared* to feel the greatest satisfaction at his return. And Evelyn himself,—what was he? just the same noble, manly, generous fellow he had ever been; ready to help everybody, and devoted to his father, as of yore. As soon as he saw him, and perceived how changed he was, he made up his mind as to his own duty; and though none but himself ever knew the sacrifice it was, he nobly resolved to give up the profession he loved so well, that he might cheer his declining days. It was often touching to see Sir Hugh now, drooping and feeble as he was, leaning on the strong young arm ever at his side. His grateful love was Evelyn's precious reward.

A few months after his return home came the news from Scotland of the death of Mrs. Forsyth. Her husband wrote at once to ascertain Sir Hugh's wishes about the child; but strongly advised that he should be left a little longer at the manse. He had been very deeply attached to his almost more than mother, and he feared that the coming among strangers so soon would be more than he could bear. Evelyn wrote by his father's desire, to say that he entirely agreed with Mr. Forsyth, and that the subject had better not be mentioned to him at present.

“Evelyn,” said his father to him one day as the year drew to its close, “there is one thing that has been a good deal on my mind lately: I feel I shan't be here much longer, my boy, and I want to talk to you about it. I've been thinking so of my other child,—my poor little Willy as they call him. It almost seems as if I had neglected him; and yet it was his mother's wish that he should be there; but now I wish to leave the

charge of him to you. I want you to be a father to him when I am gone: eh, what do you say to it?" And he looked at him anxiously.

Evelyn earnestly assented. "I promise, my dear father," he replied, "that I will, as far as possible, fill your place to him. Don't be anxious on that subject again."

"No: I shall be easy about him now. I have appointed you his sole guardian, Evelyn, for I knew I could not leave him in safer hands; so you will decide what is best about sending him to school, and so forth. But there is time enough for that at present: he is only,—let me see,—six—seven: yes, between seven and eight now; his birthday happens to be in the same month as yours,—April,—just after you came home."

This was one of the last conversations that Sir Hugh ever had with his son. He soon after took a turn for the worse, and never rallied again. Evelyn felt his death keenly. His own health, too, had suffered from the attendance and watching of the last few weeks; and Dr. Oakley, the old family physician, insisted on complete change as soon as possible. But he felt the responsibility that now rested on him; for an estate and establishment like that of Alliston brought no little care to a young man of not quite twenty-seven years, as Evelyn was now,—or rather Sir Evelyn, as we must henceforth call him. Besides, he had seen clearly enough during the last eighteen months, that things had been going on in a very unsatisfactory manner under Lady Cairne's management, and knew that if order were to be restored he must take the reins entirely into his own hands. But he resolved to leave all as it was for the present, and travel for a month or

two of the early spring in Scotland, and then he could bring his little brother home with him and begin his new life in earnest. He felt curiously, strangely drawn to this child,—this little brother he had never seen, nineteen years his junior. The charge he had received from his father he knew was no trifling one, and he resolved to fulfil it faithfully. Well would it have been for Sir Evelyn had he sought help and guidance beyond his own. He had never entirely forgotten his mother's early lessons, but like other young men, had grown up thoughtless and careless about his highest interests, while entering heart and soul into the pursuits and duties of his earthly life. Time will show by whose instrumentality the change was effected that made him all that even his mother could have wished her son to be.

CHAPTER III.

"I cannot tell how it may be : I know his face is fair,
And yet its chiefest comeliness is his sweet and serious air."

AT the end of his six weeks' tour in the Highlands, Sir Evelyn wrote to Mr. Forsyth, saying he hoped to be with him on the Tuesday of the following week, that he might take his little brother back with him to England. Janet and Elsie, the two elder daughters of the manse, were rather in fear at the idea of receiving such a visitor: they had exalted ideas of English ways, but hoped that for once the young Baronet would forego late dinner, and condescend to the substantial sort of tea that was the usual repast there. Certainly the provisions that covered the table,—the magnificent loaves of white and brown bread, the golden butter and honey, the cream and oat cakes, and last, but not least, the mighty round of salted beef, for which the manse was famous, were suggestive, however homely, of hearty welcome and good cheer. The Minister was still in his study, the boys and pupils (for he had several of the latter) in their own domains; and Willy, the one most interested of all, hovering about,—now here,—now there,—in great trepidation, if the truth must be told, at the idea of so soon meeting this unknown brother. At last, wheels were heard. Willy vanished precipitately, and Mr. Forsyth came to the door to welcome his guest.

He brought him in and presented him to his daughters, who, strange as it seemed to them, were at ease with him directly. The simple grace and courtesy of Sir Evelyn's manner usually produced this effect with most people. In due time they went into the other room for tea. Five or six children were grouped round the table. Sir Evelyn looked rather anxiously at the little rosy sandy-haired urchins, who eyed him so curiously as he came in, to see which of them all could be his little brother.

"Which is my Willy?" he asked of Elsie, as he stood beside her.

"Oh, he is not here! Where is he?" she inquired, turning to Robin, his usual companion.

"I think he went and hid himself," was the reply. "He said he did not want any tea to-night."

"Run and find him, will you, Robin?" she replied, laughing. "He must be upstairs somewhere."

In a few minutes the door re-opened and Robin came in again. Shrinking rather behind him was another little figure, towards whom Sir Evelyn turned quickly. He was a fair slight child, apparently about eight years old, though rather tall for that. His earnest eyes and golden hair, and the refined delicacy of his features, contrasted somewhat curiously with the sturdy form and ruddy colour of his companion. As he hesitated, and seemed as if he dare not venture further, Sir Evelyn went towards him almost eagerly. His heart warmed to him at once: there was such a look of his father about his eyes.

"So this is my little brother, is it?" he said, as he stooped down and kissed him. "And were you so very much afraid of coming down to see me, eh?"

The smile that accompanied these words was very re-assuring. Willy looked up,—a grateful, somewhat wistful look. This was not quite so formidable as he had expected; and as he for the first time met his new brother's eye, his infallible childish instinct told him that he had not much cause for fear. Seated at the table, between him and Elsie, he soon felt comparatively safe. He did not talk much: but that he never did; and there was plenty of conversation between Mr. Forsyth and his guest. Once or twice Willy glanced, half furtively, at the handsome face beside him: rather of a different type to any he had been used to. Apparently the result satisfied him, for once, when he caught an amused inquiring glance from Sir Evelyn's laughing dark eye, his own brightened into a very unmistakable smile. After tea they returned to the other room; but when the children did not appear, Sir Evelyn inquired if he should not see Willy again that night?

"Oh, yes," replied Janet: "they generally look over their lessons for half-an-hour now, and then come in here till bed time."

"What do you think of him?" asked Mr. Forsyth. "Is he at all what you expected?"

"He is not quite so robust looking as your laddies. Is he at all delicate?"

"No, I think not: at least he has never had any serious illness. But then my dear wife took such care of him: oh, she was devoted to that child!" And his voice faltered. "It is in her grave his little heart will be left: he is constantly there, even now; for you see she was a mother to him in everything but the name; and dearly as my own children loved her, they never seemed jealous of her love for Willy."

"Poor little lad! Well, at any rate he will have one tie the less to break in leaving you all. I suppose I had better not think of sending him to school at present?"

"Oh, no: he is too young for that; and he is just the sort of child to keep under your own eye for a year or two at least. I believe," added Mr. Forsyth, smiling, "he is rather afraid of your knowing that he has not begun Latin yet. I several times suggested it, but she always said there would be time enough. In other things he has made very fair progress."

"That can soon be remedied. The Rector of our parish takes young pupils: I can send him there at any time."

Just then the children reappeared. They soon dispersed to their several amusements; but Sir Evelyn noticed that Willy presently left the others and stole into a quiet corner with a book. He followed him, and asked what it was. Willy looked up, the colour mounting into his cheeks, and gave it to him. It was a large old-fashioned edition of "Pilgrim's Progress," filled with quaint illustrations. "Will you tell me about some of these?" asked Evelyn, by way of beginning a conversation. "It is a very long time since I have seen this book."

He sat down and took Willy on his knee, and the child soon forgot everything in the eager interest with which he went over his favourite pictures. Very gentle Sir Evelyn was with him: once or twice at the touch of his hand on his bright hair, or the low-spoken word of endearment, Willy would look up with loving eyes, as if his new possessor was not quite the formidable personage he had anticipated. "Now you won't be

quite so alarmed at seeing me in the morning, shall you?" he asked, laughingly, as he wished him good-night. "I don't fancy we shall be strangers long!"

"No, indeed," answered the child earnestly; and his somewhat eager caress at parting seemed to make him try to forget that he had ever felt so. It was early the next morning when Sir Evelyn came down stairs: the extreme beauty of the day, and wild grandeur of the scenery, tempted him to take a stroll. He wandered along a little rocky path that led up the side of the mountain. The river was flowing rapidly through the valley; on the other side the hills rose abruptly; the village and manse of Airlie nestled beneath, and farther on he just caught a glimpse of the old grey kirk, half covered with moss and ivy. A soft hazy mist was over everything—the only sounds that broke the stillness were the far-off bark of some shepherd's colley, or the lowing of the cattle on the way to their breezy pastures. He walked on, and presently found himself close to the kirk-yard wall, and he stood looking over it at the old moss-grown tombstones with their quaint inscriptions, when his eye was caught by a gleaming white monument overshadowed by a weeping tree. He presently became aware of a little motionless figure kneeling beside it, and as he drew nearer he perceived that it was Willy. He was greatly surprised to see him there so early, and all alone; but then he remembered what Mr. Forsyth had told him, and knew that the child was taking a last farewell of the spot he loved so dearly. At first he thought he would not disturb him: the golden head was bent low on the turf,—he evidently had not seen him; but just as he was turning away, a low sob, seeming to come from the very depths of that little heart, arrested him. "I

cannot leave him so," he thought. He came a step nearer. At the sound of a footstep Willy raised his head: a sort of terror came over him that his brother had come to take him away then and there, and he threw himself upon the grassy mound again in an agony of grief. "My poor child," said Sir Evelyn gently, as he stooped down and raised him in his arms, "I am sorry to see you in such distress: I didn't know you were here till I came by accident this way. Won't you let me take you home again now?" he added, as the little head sank upon his shoulder in the very unconsciousness of grief.

"Oh, not yet: not yet!" he sobbed. "Let me stay a little while longer, please do: it is the last time," he murmured as he gazed through his tears at the lowly grave, where *her* name showed so speakingly on the fair white marble. "It isn't time to go yet, is it?" "No: we have more than two hours yet; but let me wait for you. I don't like leaving you here all alone." "Oh, I am never alone here!" he answered innocently. "I will come very soon; but I must say good-bye to her." Sir Evelyn could say no more: he put him down, and then moved away through the little gate; but there he paused and waited for him, though out of sight. The violence of the child's sorrow had in some measure exhausted itself; and now for the last time in that quiet spot his young heart was lifted up in earnest prayer, that he might never forget the lessons he had learned from her he had loved so dearly,—that her Saviour might be his,—that he might meet her some day in that bright home where partings come not. "Oh aunt Effie," he murmured, "if only I might stay and lie here by your side: what shall I do without you?" He gathered a few of his cherished

flowers that were growing there, and with many a longing, lingering look, slowly turned away. He paused once more as he reached the gate. The sun was shining brightly now over the old kirk yard, except where the shadows of the yew trees softly fell. Lovingly the morning beams seemed to rest on that fair white stone, —gilding the green turf and the dewy flowers. “How beautiful it looks!” he exclaimed, “how can I bear to leave it?” And again he sobbed bitterly. But he struggled with himself, and at last grew calmer; and then he went on up the path, till the kirk itself was hidden from view by a sudden turn.

The worst of the partings was over now.

A minute after he saw Sir Evelyn's tall figure before him walking slowly on. Just as Willy came up he turned. “Here you are,” he said: “I began to think I had missed you.” And then, as he looked at him and saw the strong effort at self-command he had so evidently made, he added kindly, “Let us rest for a minute, shall we? there is plenty of time:” and sitting down on a great stone that jutted out from the steep bank, he drew him close within his arm.

“You and I must get used to each other now, little man: Eh, don't you think so?”

“Yes,” answered the child earnestly; “and—and I am so glad I have seen you, just for a little while, before you took me away to England, because, now I don't think”—he stopped. “Well, what don't you think?” asked Evelyn, amused. “I was going to say that I think perhaps you won't do as the boys said. They told me you would send me away to school directly: do you think you shall?” he added, with wide-open eyes, in which was a considerable mingling of anxiety and fear.

"No, my boy, certainly not for the present; so you may set your little heart at rest on that point. Was that all that troubled you?"

"No, not quite; for do you know I havn't learnt any Latin yet; and they said how surprised you would be at that, and perhaps angry!"

"Angry!" repeated his brother, looking down into the sweet earnest eyes that were raised almost tearfully to his. He did not add more: the tone was enough. "Have you told me everything now?" he asked, after a short pause; "and will you promise always to come to me when anything makes you unhappy? though I know," he added, drawing him nearer and speaking very tenderly, "I know I cannot be to you all you have lost." Willy's face was hidden now, for the tears would come again, he could not help it; but as Evelyn went on to tell him of his own early grief, the child clung to him, as if he felt what a strong tie was binding him to his new brother. After a while Evelyn said with a smile, "Do you know you've got one thing to do before we go in,—one little lesson to learn?"

Willy raised his head and looked up wonderingly. "I want to hear what you are going to call me: you havn't ventured upon anything yet, but I think you know my name, don't you?" and he laughed at his perplexed look.

"Yes. But do you really wish me to call you that: always, I mean?" he asked, with grave emphasis.

"Well, I suppose so," replied his brother, much amused. "How do your young cousins speak to each other?" "Ah, but that seems different; but if you wish it,—Evelyn. Will that do?" and he coloured a little as he hesitatingly pronounced his name!

"Yes, my boy, that will do," said Sir Evelyn, kissing

him. He had not heard it quite so sweetly uttered for many a day, and it awoke a tender chord within. He said no more, but getting up and taking Willy's hand they began to walk on again. This conversation had certainly drawn them much nearer together. His words were true: they would not be strangers to each other long! When they got to the manse they found breakfast ready, and everyone downstairs. Sir Evelyn and Mr. Forsyth had a few minutes conversation in the study, and then joined the others. It was rather a silent meal. Willy had endeared himself to them all, and no one liked the thought of parting with him. Elsie, who since her step-mother's death had taken special charge of him, had hard work to keep back her tears, and especially when at the last minute he clung to her, and whispered,—

“Don't forget me, Elsie: I shall think of you so often; and you will go *there* sometimes and see to my flowers,—the snowdrops are all out now!” She could not answer him. The carriage was at the door; Sir Evelyn's servants busy with the luggage. Willy went pretty well through the other partings; but when he came to Robin, his special companion and play-fellow, they both tried in vain to be brave! Mr. Forsyth came at last to fetch him.

“God bless you, my dear child,” he said, as he took him in his arms. “We shall all miss you: but I hope some day we shall see you again.”

Willy had always been somewhat in awe of his grave, rather stern uncle Robert; but now he held fast round his neck as if he could never leave him. He placed him in the carriage, Sir Evelyn followed, the door was shut, and they drove off.

Through his blinding tears Willy watched them all as they stood there, and then his head sank, and for a few minutes his sobs were very deep. His brother did not attempt any words, he only put his arm round him and made him lean against him; but now and then as he grew quieter came a caressing touch of his hand, or a low-spoken soothing word. Willy felt very grateful to him; intuitively he recognised the delicacy and real kindness that thus left his grief to have its way without attempting to check it. Gradually he drew him into conversation about the places they were passing through, and when at last he was comfortably established in the train alone with Evelyn, and they began to move on, he grew quite animated, the colour came back to his cheek and the light to his eye. He had a good sleep before they reached Perth: when the train rushed into the station he had plenty to amuse him in watching the bustle and crowd. Sir Evelyn had to speak to the station-master about some fish that he had sent on the day before, but he told Willy he should not be more than a minute away. Willy was more than half afraid of being left; but he did not venture to ask to go with him, so he consoled himself by watching Evelyn as long as ever he could see him, till at last he was lost in the crowd. Five minutes passed, and then the carriage door was opened by a porter. "There's room here, Ma'am," he said, and a lady entered. She had only a cloak and small travelling bag in her hand, her veil was down so that Willy could not see her face, and she seated herself at the other end of the carriage. He planted himself by the window again, and began to look out rather anxiously for Evelyn, for he could perceive by the

hurry on the platform that the time was nearly up. The bell rang: still no Evelyn!

"Oh, what shall I do!" he exclaimed aloud, as if unconscious of anyone else's presence. "I must get out." And he tried to open the door, but it resisted all his efforts.

"I'm afraid there is hardly time," said a gentle voice behind him. "Shall I see if I can help you?" At that moment, however, the train began to move on, and Willy, losing all his self-command, burst into tears. "Oh, he will be left behind," he exclaimed: what shall I do?"

"Poor child! Who is it you have lost?"

He looked up. "It's my brother," he sobbed. "He is taking me to his home in England, a long way off, and I have never been there before. Oh, where can he be!"

"Why, do you know, I think it is very likely he may be in the train after all," she replied: "it's a very long one, and perhaps he had not time to get up here, and then you will be sure to see him at Stirling, when we stop again."

"Do you really think so?" and Willy's tone was rather more hopeful. "How long shall we be before we get there? But oh, if he is not!" And again he was quite overwhelmed.

The girl put her arms softly round him, and tried to soothe him, and at last he seemed almost fascinated into quietness. She had put aside her veil, and now the beauty of that fair young face struck his childish fancy strangely.

"How kind you are to me. What should I have done if you had not been here?" and gradually he went on

to tell her how he was leaving his old home, and how he had loved his dear aunt Effie, who was now in heaven. "Ah, but she is happy now," he murmured; "and I shall not be further away from her, shall I?"

"No," she answered tenderly. "I feel just the same about my mother. I often think that she is near me,—my sweet mother!" she added dreamily. "Well, she is safe,—safe with the Saviour she loved and trusted."

Willy looked up,—a look of perfect intelligence and earnest sympathy, and then they went on talking, till he almost forgot his trouble. As they neared Stirling and the train began to slacken speed, he stood by the window again in breathless anxiety. The moment it stopped his head was out: but he saw nothing. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Oh, there he is! Evelyn! Evelyn! Here I am!"

Sir Evelyn hurried towards him, and as he opened the door Willy nearly jumped into his arms.

"My dear child," he exclaimed, as he got into the carriage, "I have been thinking of you all the time. I was sure you would be frightened at being left; but the fact is, I most unexpectedly fell in with an old friend at Perth,—he used to be in my regiment, and we were talking so busily till the last moment, that I had only time to rush into the first carriage I could see, as the train was moving on, and it was quite at the other end. Were you very much alarmed?" he added, smiling.

"Yes, I was at first. I thought what *would* become of me: but I don't mind a bit now." And he looked up so lovingly that Sir Evelyn involuntarily bent his head for a kiss.

"I see you have remembered your lesson," he

whispered. "I shall know what to do now if ever you forget!"

"Oh, I never thought what I was saying," said Willy, laughing. "I was so pleased to see you come back. But I shall remember without that: I don't want you to go away again."

They were going on fast now. Willy's friend had moved back to her former place.

"Evelyn," he said, after a pause, and half looking towards her as he spoke, "I don't know what I should have done all this time if that lady hadn't been so kind to me. She said I might find you again at Stirling; and she talked to me for a long time, and gave me all the biscuits she had for herself, for I was very hungry."

"But why didn't you have your luncheon? I told Wilson to put the hamper in here."

"Yes, it is under that seat; but I couldn't open it,—its tied so fast."

Sir Evelyn made short work of that, and before them was a tempting supply for hungry folk.

"I think, Willy, you ought to offer something to your friend: don't you?" asked his brother, in a low voice.

"Oh: may I?" he replied, eagerly. "Yes: do let me take her something."

Evelyn put some chicken on a plate, and Willy went carefully across with it.

"Please have some," he said, as she looked up from her book. "I'm afraid I took all your biscuits!"

"Thank you," she said, smiling, as she took the plate from his hand: but her eyes were raised to Sir Evelyn with a half shy, half questioning look.

Possibly he was struck, as Willy had been. He did not speak for a moment; then he leaned forward and

said, in his own graceful way, "Will you allow me to thank you for your great kindness to my little brother ?

He has just been telling me about it, and does not know how to be grateful enough."

"The colour rose slightly as she replied, "I am afraid I did not do much for him ; but he seemed glad to have someone to talk to."

"Yes, indeed," put in Willy. "What should I have done if you had not told me I should see Evelyn at Stirling ?"

His hearers could not help laughing at this very innocent statement ; and then Sir Evelyn returned to his duties, and set Willy to work too. The luncheon was a merry one. Two wine-glasses, knives and forks, having to do the work of three ; but Evelyn and Willy shared theirs, to the great amusement of the latter. When they had finished, Willy stole again to the side of his new friend, and for a long time they were busy with the little book she had been reading. Sir Evelyn read, or appeared to read, his newspaper ; but the picture before him was rather distracting. The two young heads were bent close together : her's, with its waving masses of soft brown hair, almost touching Willy's golden curls. He thought they seemed to have something in common that interested them very much. At last, a great deal too soon for Willy, the train reached Edinburgh. There they all had to alight. An elderly serving-woman, as they say in Scotland, was awaiting the arrival of the young stranger, and seemed anxious to hurry her away as soon as possible.

"I have no luggage, thank you," she replied, in answer to Sir Evelyn's almost eager offer to look after it : "it came yesterday by another way."

"Oh, must you really go," exclaimed Willy, discon-

solutely. "I wish you were going to stay with us always. Shall we never see you again?"

She half smiled as she replied: "I am afraid there is not much chance of that. But will you take this to remember me by?" and she put the little book they had been reading into his hands.

Willy was delighted. "Oh, how kind of you!" he said, earnestly. "I did so want to hear some more," and almost unconsciously he lifted his face to kiss her.

She stooped instantly, and they exchanged a loving farewell; and then, with a somewhat heightened colour, she turned to Sir Evelyn, who was standing by. "You must let me thank you now," she said, simply, "for letting me have so much of him: one does not get such a little companion every day." And she looked towards Willy, who was just then intent upon his new treasure.

"I am very sorry you have to part company so soon," replied Sir Evelyn, warmly; "but I think the obligation is still on my side, for you have been extremely kind to him. But will you not even let me see you to your carriage?" as she half moved on, warned by the impatient looks of her sour-visaged attendant.

"Oh, no, thank you," she replied: "it is close at hand;" and then with a slight bow she hurried away.

Sir Evelyn raised his hat. He watched her till she was out of sight, and then taking Willy's hand went down the platform for fresh tickets. Once he asked to look at the little book, and turned somewhat quickly to the title-page; but the only words he found there were,—"To my little May, from her most loving mother:" that was all. He gave the book back silently, and soon they were off again, meeting no further adventures till they reached Alliston.

CHAPTER IV.

“Often in my dreams I’ve seen
The gleams where childish feet have been.”

WILLY was considerably impressed with all he saw on their arrival at the last station. The handsome carriage with its splendid pair of bays, the tall footmen who attended their master with such solemn deference,—all seemed very different to the little old pony-carriage at the manse, and Sandy McPherson, who combined in his own person the offices of coachman, groom, and gardener! They were soon driving fast away, the country looking so clothed and wooded after the wild Scottish moors and mountains. At last they turned into the park through the lodge gates, and after a further drive of nearly a mile, stopped at the great entrance hall door. When they entered Willy was perfectly lost in astonishment. The spacious hall looked to him like a magnificent room filled with tables, sofas, and easy chairs. There were two fire-places, over which hung stags’ horns and various tokens of the chase; and all round the walls were portraits of the Allistons of bygone days, looking strangely down at him. Several doors opened from this hall to various parts of the house. Through one of these Sir Evelyn turned, having first spoken to the old house steward, who, notwithstanding his dignity, seemed over-joyed to see his young master again.

"You had better come with me and see aunt Cairne the first thing," he said to Willy, who was holding fast by his hand and wondering where all the great corridors led to; "they will be in the morning-room to-night, I should think."

Willy was rather alarmed; but before he could say a word, Evelyn had opened the door of what seemed to him a very large room, filled with the soft perfume of flowers, and radiant with light and warmth.

"Here they are," he said, as he ushered him into the presence of three ladies; and having shaken hands with them himself, proceeded to introduce him. First,—to Lady Cairne, who received him with a cold, though sufficiently polite welcome. She had greatly disliked the idea of his coming; for she never forgot how his young mother had once stood in her way, and she had already conceived an invincible prejudice against her child. Laura's greeting was the counterpart of her mother's; and that of Miss Lester, a friend who was staying there, much the same. Poor Willy! his little heart seemed to shrink into itself,—he felt strangely ill at ease, and held faster by Evelyn, as if he was his only refuge. "I suppose you have dined?" said Sir Evelyn at last, when some further conversation had passed.

"Yes," replied Lady Cairne: "I was not sure which train you would come by."

"All right: then you and I, little man, will go and have something now, and then I daresay you will like to go to bed."

Willy assented eagerly: he seemed to breathe freely again when seated alone with his brother at the bright, well-furnished table. His extreme gentleness and kindness would have made him feel happy anywhere; but it

was pleasant to have him all to himself again. When they had finished, Evelyn drew up his chair to the fire, feeling pretty sure that Willy would not care to go back to the other room to-night. How pleased he was. He seated himself on a low footstool at his brother's side, and drawing his arm round him, looked supremely happy. After a while Evelyn took him upstairs, and showed him where his room was. The wide staircases and passages seemed to him almost interminable; but at last they reached it.

"Oh how beautiful!" exclaimed Willy. "But surely this isn't my room, Evelyn?"

"It is indeed," he answered, laughing: "don't you approve of it?"

But Willy's eye was wandering round the spacious richly-furnished room, with an intuitive perception of the refinement and beauty of its various appointments. He found no words at first. The firelight glimmered cheerfully over the warm, bright curtains, and carpet, and the tasteful draperies of the little bed. There were pictures too; and lovely hot-house flowers, such as Willy had hardly ever seen. All contrasted strongly with his former tiny room at the manse.

Sir Evelyn had, of course, given orders to have everything suitably prepared for his little brother; but he was amused at his looks of almost bewildered admiration. Accustomed as he was to it all himself, perhaps he hardly realized how new it must be to him. "Look here," he said, as he opened a door on the other side the room, "this is my dressing-room, so you will be near me."

Willy saw that this was even larger than his own, and beyond that was his bed-room.

"How very nice," he exclaimed at last: "and I am so glad I shall be near you!"

Evelyn left him there, and said he would come back soon to wish him good night.

When he returned in about a quarter of an hour he found him fresh and rosy from his bath,—his curls yet glistening with their recent sprinkling. "How bright you look," he said, as he sat down by the fire and took him on his knee: "you're ready for bed now I suppose?"

"I have 'nt said my prayers yet," he answered innocently. "Shall I say my hymn to you to-night?"

"Certainly, if you like," replied his brother; half-touched, half-amused at his confiding simplicity and earnestness. But as he listened, how vividly memory recalled the days when he used to say his childish hymns, and kneel at his mother's knee to pray. Ah! was he nearer, or farther off from heaven now, than when he was a boy?

Willy's voice faltered as he came to the last verse.

"Be Thou my Saviour to the end,
And Thy weak child with grace defend;
Till by the path that thou hast trod
I reach the blissful home of God."

Thoughts of that home, and the loved one he had lost came over him, mingled with memories of the manse and those that were left there. It was too much; and covering his face with his hands, he tried in vain to stay his tears. "Poor child," said Sir Evelyn fondly: "never mind, it is very natural you should feel so to-night." "Oh, I couldn't help it," he sobbed. "That was the last hymn I ever said to aunt Effie: I'm very sorry." "But you needn't be: I dont want you to be a bit

afraid of saying and feeling just as you like with me, my boy."

His thanks were very earnestly though quietly given ; and then he got down, and as it seemed quite naturally knelt at his brother's side to say his evening prayer. Evelyn's hand passed fondly over the bowed head, as he resolved earnestly to fulfil his father's trust, and try to take his place to the gentle child who seemed so entirely left to his care now.

Willy rose from his knees at last ; and then with an indescribable look of wistful, appealing tenderness, he came close to Evelyn and put both his arms round his neck. He hid his face there too, but without a word. It was the silent transfer of his childish love and allegiance from those who could nurture him no more to him who was henceforth to be the guide and ruler of his little life. The action was unmistakable. Evelyn held him very close as he whispered, "We must be everything to each other now, my child."

Willy raised his head, and the compact was sealed by a long, loving embrace.

A child's simple unquestioning love is a very precious thing. Sir Evelyn felt something of it now. Oh ye who are inclined to esteem it lightly, put not away from you the treasure ; it is a gift direct from heaven, and is the purest, sweetest type on earth of that which reigns always there !

The next day Willy was initiated into all the beauties and delights of his new home, with its lovely gardens, its hot-houses and conservatories, and all the costly appointments of the various rooms. He almost fancied he was in fairyland. In the evening Mrs. Humphreys came to look after him, while the late dinner was going

on. Her kind motherly ways quite won his little heart, and he chatted away contentedly while she was looking to the fit of the pretty new velvet suit in which he was to go into the dining-room afterwards. There were several visitors that night. Willy was rather afraid; but Evelyn guessed how it might be, and came to the door himself to call him. He came running down stairs then, and Sir Evelyn brought him in; and half-laughingly, half-proudly presented him to his guests. His extreme childish beauty and winning manner pleased everybody; but he kept very close to Evelyn, as if he hardly felt safe anywhere else yet. For several days all went on smoothly: he was constantly with his brother; for Lady Cairne and her daughter took but little notice of him, though they were not positively unkind; still there was an unconquerable feeling of dislike in the mind of the former, and the invariable thoughtfulness of Evelyn for the child seemed to irritate her still more. Here it may be remarked, that Sir Hugh had advised—though by no means enjoined—his son to let her continue at Alliston for a time at least; and his father's slightest wish was law to him. So she still remained, ostensibly as much mistress there as ever, though she felt that gradually a change was coming.

Sir Evelyn had arranged with Mr. Randolph for Willy's daily lessons at the Rectory. The hours were to be from half-past nine till three. He would dine early there with the other boys, and then have his afternoons free to be with Evelyn. As may be supposed he had sundry fears on the subject.

"You see, I have never done many lessons with other boys," he remarked one day to Evelyn with grave sim-

plicity ; " and I didn't even begin Latin. I wish I was always going to do them with you ! "

" Nay : how can you tell what I might be ? " laughed his brother, " I might turn out a terrible tyrant for aught you know ! "

Willy's look up at him seemed to satisfy him on that point, however ; and yet for the next few minutes his mind was running curiously on a text that had come in his morning's reading, about enduring hardness as a good soldier, and he wondered what he should do if ever his brother's authority *did* run counter to the commands of Him to whom his young allegiance had so early been given. Several little occurrences had already made him feel that he did not quite think with him in some things ; and a half-misgiving crossed his mind. Little did he then think how that would one day be realized ! On Monday morning Sir Evelyn went down with him to the Rectory, and introduced him to Mr. Randolph. He was a tall, rather grave-looking man. Evelyn felt Willy's hand tremble in his as he entered the room ; but he greeted his little pupil kindly. " I am sure we shall soon be good friends," he said, " though this is not the first time I have seen you." Willy looked up wonderingly.

" It is quite true," said Mr. Randolph, with a smile, " though you don't remember it : you were but a few hours old when I first had you in my arms ! It seems but yesterday," he added thoughtfully, as he recalled that sorrowful time at Alliston Hall.

" I never thought of that," said Sir Evelyn : " it must have been just about the time that you came here."

" Yes : his baptism was the very first service I performed ; so you see I take a special interest in him."

When his brother was gone, Mr. Randolph sat down and drew the child to him, and began a very gentle examination. Willy was timid enough at first, but he soon gained courage and answered readily ; and then he was introduced to his companions. That afternoon he amused Evelyn much by his eager account of his first day's experiences. He had no reason to doubt the wisdom of his decision to send him there.

He soon fell into the routine of his new life. His letters to Scotland were full of the beauties of his English home, and Evelyn's kindness to him. Not that the latter by any means spoiled him : he was too sensible for that. The few rules he laid down were strictly enforced ; but Willy was not a very difficult child to deal with. Religion had taken a strong hold upon him ; and he tried to live as in the constant presence of that Saviour whose own he desired to be. The very intensity, too, of his love for his brother made him restless and uneasy if ever he *was* at all dissatisfied with him, till all was right again. But their loving companionship was not often broken thus. Clouds from another quarter, however, sometimes troubled him. His Sundays, for instance, were a source of great anxiety to him. He had been used in Scotland to see such a marked difference made between that and other days,—such a seriousness in the tone of conversation and the books that were read, that when he first came to Alliston the contrast struck him painfully.

Church once a day was all that was thought of, and novels and newspapers were read just as usual. When he saw Evelyn doing this he was greatly perplexed ; for in his childish love and trust he would hardly allow, even to himself, that anything could be wanting in him.

But ere long the truth was forced upon him, and was the cause of many an earnest longing and tearful prayer. He could not bear the thought that one he loved so dearly was a stranger to that happiness that was all in all to him. Yet so it was! Very seldom did Willy venture to *say* anything; but his whole life, with its sweet, unconscious influence, showed what he was. Evelyn fancied it was his Scottish bringing up that had made him strict and "Puritanical," as he called it. He hoped the effects would gradually wear off, and in the meantime endeavoured in various ways, though seldom by anything like coercion, to bring this about. With Lady Cairne Willy never felt much more at home than he did at first: she seemed always on the watch for something against him; so he generally kept out of her way as much as possible. She had used every argument in her power to induce Evelyn to send him to school, but without success. Perhaps she thought that if he were less engrossed with Willy he would have more time and attention to bestow on her daughter. Lady Cairne did not know Sir Evelyn yet.

It happened one afternoon, while he was away in London for a week or two, that her ladyship returning from a drive, saw Willy coming out of a cottage, situated indeed just within the limits of the park, but the abode of a notorious poacher whom Sir Evelyn had many times wished to get rid of. For some service rendered to Sir Hugh Alliston this man had received a promise of this house for the rest of his life: so there he remained. He had been several times in prison, and knew that next time nothing could save him from transportation. He had a wife, a poor sickly creature, and one little boy, whom Willy had often seen loitering

about, looking miserably forlorn and wretched. One day he spoke to him, and found that he never went to school, though he was most anxious to learn to read. He had learned partly once, and now his ambition was to be able to read the Bible to his mother: the one redeeming point about the lad was his love for her. Willy was much interested, and eagerly offered to help him: he had plenty of time on his hands now. So the two began, and passed hours in diligent study. He found a very apt pupil, and soon his little reading lessons became a source of very great interest and pleasure to him. On one occasion only he had ventured into the house, and this was at Johnny's earnest request that he would come and read a chapter to his mother. "She was worse that day, and had been wanting to see the 'parson,' only father won't never let him come nigh the place," he added: "he threatened to shoot him last time." So Willy went, and was more than repaid by the touching gratitude of the poor invalid, who seemed to drink in with unspeakable joy the holy words of peace and comfort uttered by those childish lips.

It was on this very occasion that he was seen, as described, by Lady Cairne. Now, at any rate, she had got hold of something that Evelyn could not but disapprove of. She angrily desired Willy to go home at once; ordering poor Johnny off at the same time, in no very gentle tones. And then she so expatiated to Willy on what Evelyn's displeasure would be at his being found in the house of the most notorious vagabond and poacher about the place, that the poor child began to dread, almost as much as he had longed for his return. He came that afternoon. Lady Cairne followed him at once to the library, where he had rather hurried to finish

a letter ; having first inquired, with a little wonder, where Willy was. *

"It is about Willy that I want to speak to you," said her ladyship, acidly : "I think now you will find that I have not always been mistaken in my opinion of him." And then she went on with great energy to tell her story : ending,—"I do hope, Evelyn, you will take serious notice of this ; it is not a thing to pass over lightly. The idea of such a child choosing to associate with such people is unpardonable."

Sir Evelyn himself was more perplexed than he let appear : he could hardly understand Willy's voluntary choice of such companionship.

"You had better send him to me, aunt Cairne : do you know where he is ?"

"Upstairs, I believe. He did not much relish seeing you again, I can assure you ; and no wonder !"

"I'm going up myself directly," replied Sir Evelyn, quietly, "so I shall find him."

A few minutes later, as he was running up the stairs two or three at a time in his usual fashion, he almost stumbled over Willy, who had ventured half-way down and there stopped.

"Hallo !" he exclaimed, catching him up in his arms as he went on, "so here you are : why didn't you come down before and see me ?"

"I thought aunt Cairne was talking to you," he replied, timidly, though considerably reassured by his brother's manner.

"Yes : so she was,—she followed me to the library directly I got in."

He did not add more. Willy looked up quickly. "And arn't you very angry then, Evelyn ? she said

you would be, and perhaps you would *never* forgive me."

"Hardly that," laughed Sir Evelyn, as they entered his room; "but I want to have a word with you about this, Willy. Did you think really that that lad Cave was a proper companion for you,—one that I should have allowed: tell me?"

"No: and that's why aunt Cairne said so much. But indeed, Evelyn, I have never played with him: I have only been trying,"—he hesitated,—"trying to teach him to read."

Evelyn was silent for a moment. This was somewhat different from Lady Cairne's version of the affair.

"To teach him to read, eh! And why couldn't he go to school and learn?" Willy explained.

"Well:" said his brother, "I can quite understand it, and do not for a moment suppose you meant to do wrong; but from this time remember, Willy, you must never go to that house again: that fellow Cave is the worst poacher about the place, and I cannot allow you to be seen there on any account."

"But the poor woman, Evelyn!" exclaimed Willy, the tears starting to his eyes, "she is so ill; and Johnny, what will he say when he does not find me under the hawthorn tree again? I have never been to the house but that once: but mayn't he come to me there?"

"No: I must forbid it for the sake of others. I am sorry for the lad; but Cave has been warned often enough, and if his sins are visited on his family he has only himself to thank for it."

Willy said no more. Sadly he felt that his little work was done: but how thankful he was that he had been able to do something.

That evening Sir Evelyn explained the matter to Lady Cairne, and told her what he had done. But this by no means satisfied her: she was extremely provoked at the signal failure of her attempt to get Willy into trouble with him. However, she bided her time, and resolved on another mode of attack. Her temper just at this time was not improved by the various changes that Sir Evelyn had been compelled to make in the management of the household. He had quietly but firmly taken the reins into his own hands, and every member of the family soon thankfully felt the difference. It was on Willy, however, that her ladyship vented her displeasure as often as she dared. One afternoon he came in as usual from the Rectory, and not finding Evelyn about, went into the dining-room to look for him. Luncheon was hardly over, but only Lady Cairne and Laura were there.

"Do you know where Evelyn is?" he asked, "I can't find him anywhere."

"What do you want him for?" inquired his aunt, not in her sweetest tones.

"Oh, he only said he would take me a walk this afternoon to Alliston Lea. I daresay he is about somewhere."

"No he is *not*," said Lady Cairne: "he went off to Overston the moment he had finished luncheon, so you won't see much more of him to-day." She did not add that he had suddenly been summoned there on electioneering business. But she went on with what she had long determined to say some time.

"I really am surprised, Willy, at the way in which you worry Evelyn. You seem to think he has nothing in the world to do but attend to you: you are always

following him about. Of course he can't like it! I wonder you don't see it for yourself!"

Poor Willy: this was the first time such an idea had crossed his mind. It seemed almost to petrify him.

"But—but I thought he liked to have me with him, aunt Cairne: he always says so!"

"Yes:" put in Laura, "but you don't suppose he means it, never having been used to children at all. It must worry him dreadfully, as mamma says, to have you always in his way, as you are."

Lady Cairne saw that this idea would work. So as they left the room, for fear he should go farther than she intended, she remarked:—

"Now Willy, take my advice. Don't go and say a word to Evelyn; but just for the future keep to yourself a little more, and see how much better he will like it."

Willy said nothing. He stole out of the open window and went away to his own favourite place under the old lime tree in the shrubbery walk. There was a smooth piece of grass just round the tree, and here he would often come with a book and amuse himself for hours. But he sat down now and hid his face in his hands, for he felt quite bewildered and very unhappy. Was it really so? *Had* he been all this time such a trouble to Evelyn? He had not, as Laura said, been used to children; and perhaps he had often and often been in his way, little as he had dreamed of it. Just then he felt a touch on his hand, and looking up saw "Athos," a great black retriever, his constant companion and most staunch friend. As the dog crouched down beside him he threw his arms round him. "Poor old Athos," he murmured, "I'm glad I've got you. You won't get

tired of me, will you?" And in spite of himself the tears would come. Athos meanwhile sitting quite gravely, and looking as if he perfectly understood the mute appeal and his own responsibility.

"Do you know where master Willy is?" inquired Sir Evelyn of one of the footmen when he came in that afternoon. "In the garden, I believe, Sir Evelyn: I saw him there some time ago!" Evelyn guessed where he should find him, and there under the lime tree he came upon him at last.

It was a pretty picture! Willy was fast asleep,—one arm still round Athos. The fair curls contrasting curiously with the black, shaggy coat on which they were resting so confidingly. A tear was yet undried on his cheek, and there was something in his whole attitude and look that betokened some sort of trouble. The dog wagged his great tail at his master's approach, but did not offer to stir. The slight movement, however, awoke Willy. He started up, and there was Evelyn bending over him.

"You've got a nice soft pillow at any rate," he said, smiling as he stroked Athos's head. "I am so sorry I could not take you the walk I promised this afternoon: but what is the matter, my boy?" he added, noticing his look. And he sat down on the wooden seat under the tree, and drew him within his arm.

"Oh, its nothing!" said Willy, rather falteringly, remembering Lady Cairne's words, and feeling instinctively the difficulty of telling Evelyn the cause of his trouble.

"Nothing? with that tear still there? Nay: I am sure you have been unhappy about something. Won't you tell me, Willy?"—and the words were very gently

spoken. "Don't you remember you once promised always to come to me if anything troubled you?"

Willy's head sank. It was hard to resist that appeal. "Yes: but—but indeed I can't this time, Evelyn. Its nothing—nothing I could tell you: don't ask me."

"Ah: but I have asked you! Is it anything you've been doing that you think I should disapprove of? if so, don't be afraid of telling me."

How truly it was, just that very thing, but in a different sense to what he meant.

"Yes: but I didn't know. I never thought of it till to-day, when aunt Cairne told me:" and he fairly broke down then, and sobbed out all his story on Evelyn's breast. "Indeed I will try to remember now," he added, through his tears. "I thought I could not be in your way here, and yet you found me."

Sir Evelyn was silent a moment from surprise and indignation. This then was the way in which Lady Cairne was now trying to separate them. He felt very angry, but there was exceeding tenderness in his voice when he spoke again.

"Oh Willy, Willy, what a child you are! What do you deserve for this, eh?" he went on, as he stroked back his hair. "Have you any idea how much you have offended me?"

"Willy raised his head. That one look into his brother's eyes was enough.

"Oh Evelyn!" he exclaimed, "I hardly did believe it all the time: and yet aunt Cairne said so much. But I am quite happy now:" and he nestled into his arms as if he meant what he said, and no mistake. But a minute after he looked up. "Evelyn," he whispered earnestly, "if ever I am in your way, you will tell

me, won't you? I couldn't bear to be a trouble to you; but I've only you now, you know."

"Hush, my dear child!" said his brother, rather quickly. "Why, the only way in which you *could* trouble me is by fancying such a thing possible. No, no! you and I belong to each other now, and you must never let anybody or anything come between us. Will you remember this always, Willy?"

He did not speak; but the silent earnestness of the childish embrace was more than a full answer. That evening Sir Evelyn gave Lady Cairne to understand that he knew all about her advice to Willy, and pretty plainly informed her that he could not and would not allow any interference between the child and himself.

"I only did it out of consideration for you, Evelyn," was the reply. "I had no idea Willy would be so foolish as to repeat it."

"I insisted on knowing what was the matter with him, aunt Cairne. Willy has no secrets from me, and never again can I have him told to keep back anything." There was a look in his eye as he spoke before which her ladyship absolutely quailed. She was silent; but hardly felt more kindly disposed towards the child after the failure of this second attempt to sow discord between him and Evelyn.

CHAPTER V.

“My heart is sair : I dared’na tell
My heart is sair for somebody.”

ABOUT two miles from Alliston was a pretty old-fashioned looking house called “The Priory.” It was curiously built, with long, low, sunny rooms, quaint terraces and gardens, and surrounded by trees and shrubberies. It belonged to Col. Eversley, who, with his family, had long resided there, and had always been the intimate friends as they were the nearest neighbours of the Allistons. People had often speculated on the probability of an alliance between the two families, for Evelyn and Grace, the second daughter, had been from childhood constant companions ; but, as it so often happens, they had grown up too completely as brother and sister ever to become anything more to each other. The former having no sisters of his own, had been accustomed to make her the repository of all his boyish hopes and ambitions, and latterly she had often laughingly asked him when *the* important secret was to be confided to her ; for, like everyone else, she imagined that Sir Evelyn must ere long bring a wife to his beautiful home. At present, however, he seemed perfectly heart-whole ! Little cause as there was for it, Grace Eversley was the rival most dreaded by Lady Cairne ; for it must be

understood that she still clung fondly as ever to the hope of seeing her child one day the wife of Sir Evelyn Alliston: she need not have feared Grace! The eldest daughter—Mrs. Wilton—was a widow, and since her husband's death had returned to live at home. Mabel, the youngest, was a wild, frolicsome girl, full of life and spirits. She and Evelyn were firm friends, and at the same time sworn foes. She treated him with all the privileged familiarity of a younger sister: always delighted to tease him in any way, and he in his turn never spared her. The only son was with his regiment abroad. The two families met constantly. Grace and Mabel had taken a great fancy to Willy, and, as Sir Evelyn often remarked, did *their* very best to spoil him, adding that it would give him endless trouble to undo *their* work; whereupon Mabel would retort the old proverb about "glass houses and throwing stones," and advise him to practise first before he presumed to lecture them. One morning, Willy having finished his usual Latin lesson (which he always said to Evelyn in preparation for Mr. Randolph), was standing by the window, when he suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, Evelyn, do come and look: Forster is leading such a beautiful little white pony down the drive, with a new saddle on! and he's got *such* a long tail. Do come."

Sir Evelyn smiled as he complied. "I've seen him before, Willy: I bought him for a friend of mine. What do you think he will say to him?"

But before Willy could reply his brother's hands came and lifted him up before the large pier-glass between the windows.

"There he is," he said, laughing. "What does he think?"

Willy was fairly overwhelmed. "Oh, Evelyn!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean that? Is it really for me? Oh, I don't know how to thank you! how very, very kind."

Evelyn was almost as much pleased as he was.

"Did'nt I promise you a ride before long? Yes, its your own: come down and try how you like him."

Willy's delight when he was mounted and riding round the drive cannot be told: they made a pretty pair, at least so thought his brother as he watched them. That afternoon they rode to the Priory, Willy being all impatience to show Grace and Mabel his new possession. They found them in the garden, busy with a new fernery.

"Look!" exclaimed Willy as they rode up: "did you ever see such a beautiful pony? Evelyn has given him to me, and his name is Snowdrop."

Grace and Evelyn exchanged glances: it was not the first time she had seen it and known of its destination.

"Dear me, it is a beauty!" said Mabel, stroking its neck. "I wish he would give me such a one too."

"You must deserve it first," laughed Sir Evelyn, as he dismounted. "I think I am pretty safe if I promise you one then."

"I wont speak to you," retorted Mabel, tossing her head. "Come, Willy, you and I will go and amuse ourselves: these two are not worthy of our company!"

Willy looked up at Evelyn as if to ask permission.

"Yes: you may go. But I shall not be very long: so don't go far."

Sir Evelyn was always glad of a talk with Grace. Her quiet, sensible, womanly advice and sympathy were just what he needed, vexed as he constantly was by

Lady Cairne's manœuvring and interference. Grace often wished he would get rid of her; but knowing what his father's wish had been, and knowing, too, that as long as he remained un-married it was desirable to have a lady in the house, she forbore to say so; she therefore always tried to take the bright side of things, and with her sprightly talk and cheery prognostications usually contrived to disperse the cloud. They wandered on into a little wood, talking busily, till Evelyn suddenly recollected Willy, and they turned to go back again. As they passed a certain sunny glade, Evelyn remarked, "Look, Gracie: do you remember it was down there that Harry Wyndham and I went after those nuts for you? He persevered much better than I did, though."

Was it the shadow of the leaves, or was it the colour that deepened on her cheek, as she replied, quietly, "Yes: I remember it well."

She added no more. Ah! what had Gracie ever forgotten of that dewy, still September evening, when she walked through the golden woods, side by side with "somebody," and a little winged messenger had entered her heart, that silently, perhaps half unconsciously, lingered there still. Sir Evelyn, however, noticed nothing as they walked on. Soon they reached the little gate leading out into the garden, and rejoined the others; then the horses were ordered, and Evelyn and Willy rode off. A few weeks after this an incident occurred which gave Evelyn a somewhat different view of the character of his little charge to any that he had had before. He was sitting alone in the study one afternoon, when there came a very low, hesitating knock at the door, and Willy came in, looking rather

unlike his usual self: his face was downcast, and he had evidently been crying.

"Why, what's the matter?" exclaimed Evelyn.
"What have you been crying about, my boy?"

"Oh, Evelyn, I've come to tell you something, and I'm afraid you will be very angry when you know!"

"Well, at any rate, the best thing you could have done was to tell me yourself," he replied, drawing him nearer. "What is it?"

"I've—I've disobeyed you. I don't know what you will say; but I was just speaking to Mrs. Humphreys in her room, when that poor little boy Johnny Cave came to the door. He said his mother was dying, and no one had been to her; and she kept asking all the time for me to come and read those same verses to her that I had read once before, so at last Johnny came to see if I would go."

"And did you, Willy?" asked Evelyn, gravely, "after what I had said."

"Yes: I did,—I did," he sobbed. "I did not forget that, and I came here to ask you if I might not just this once, but you were out, so I ran with Johnny: I seemed as if I could not help it, Evelyn. And when she saw me she held my hand so fast, and wanted the verses over and over again; and then she seemed happier. She thought Jesus would forgive her, too. Oh," he continued, with kindling eyes, "it was beautiful to see the look of joy come over her face! I do think she is happy now!"

In his eagerness he seemed, for the moment, to have forgotten his fears; and Sir Evelyn himself could not help being struck with the artless story: he felt that there were depths in that childish heart that he could

not fathom: faith in unseen realities beyond his ken! His fingers were abstractedly stroking back, over and over again, a stray little curl that would fall over Willy's forehead,—apparently unconscious of what he did, for he was curiously perplexed. Notwithstanding his soldier-like ideas of the penalties due to actual disobedience, he felt that he could hardly be severe in this case. It almost seemed indeed as if the little child before him had, all unwittingly, taught him a lesson,—a lesson of brave self-sacrifice for one in whom he could possibly have no natural interest. What is it, he thought, that made him venture thus, and then come straight and tell me himself,—afraid, as he evidently is: I cannot understand it. The silence made Willy look up. Something in his brother's face, and that almost caressing touch of his hand, seemed half to belie his fears. The look recalled Evelyn.

"Well, Willy," he said, "by your own confession it was an act of direct disobedience, and you know I have always said"—

At that moment one of the footmen came to the door with a message from the head keeper, to know if Sir Evelyn could see him for a minute; he was waiting in the steward's room. "Very well, I will come directly: the new dogs have come, I suppose. You stay here," he continued, turning to Willy, "till I come back."

His brother's former words had not much reassured him, and he awaited his return with considerable anxiety. It was more than ten minutes, but Evelyn had not been all this time with the keeper. As he passed the housekeeper's room, a thought struck him, and he went in.

"Mrs. Humphreys, I want to know about Master

Willy's going with that lad Cave: did you hear anything about it?"

"Yes, sir: I was here when he came, and I followed them to the cottage. Master Willy seemed as if he hardly knew what to do: but oh, Mr. Evelyn," continued the old lady, wiping her eyes, "if you had but seen and heard, you'd never have forgotten! He seemed like a real little angel come down into that wretched place, and the poor creature wouldn't let him go. She seemed quite changed before he left."

"Poor thing! Well, you must let her have anything she wants now, of course."

"I did take her some wine and jelly, and one or two other things, sir. But she wont want anything long: she will hardly live the night through, I think."

As Sir Evelyn went back along the hall, he had, as may be supposed, pretty nearly made up his mind about Willy; but he wanted to see what had been the child's own thought about it,—whether he fancied that in such a case the end justified the means, and so far his disobedience to himself.

"Tell me, now," he said, sitting down and drawing Willy to his side again, "what have you been thinking about all this yourself? Do you feel that you deserve to get into trouble for doing what seemed to you so right at the time, even though I had forbidden it?"

The question was an unexpected one. Willy looked up quickly, but his natural simple truthfulness prevailed.

"Yes, Evelyn: and I was afraid all the time to think how displeased you would be, but somehow I felt as if I could bear anything for her. She will so soon be gone, I shall never see her again: but oh," he

continued in a broken voice, "you don't, know how sorry I am to have disobeyed you!"

"I do know it; I am sure of it, my dear child. There, don't cry: there was such an unusually strong reason for what you did this time, that I don't mean to say a word more about it; so you needn't be frightened at me now," he added, smiling, as he lifted him on to his knee. The sudden revulsion was too much. Willy could only cling to him in his relief and gratitude; but Evelyn felt how he was trembling, and realized more than ever the disinterested bravery he had shown. After a while he took him up to the kennels, to see the new pointers; great beauties they certainly were, for Sir Evelyn spared no expense with either his dogs or horses.

"Just look at those two!" exclaimed Lady Cairne, as she saw them pass from the morning-room window. "I really think Evelyn gets more infatuated about that child every day. He never seems happy without him now."

"No," returned Laura: "there's no such thing as getting Evelyn by himself at any time," and there was a considerable amount of annoyance and impatience in her tone.

Meanwhile the two pursued their way all unconsciously, Willy having hold of Evelyn's hand as usual, and chatting merrily to him all the time. As they came back from the kennels, they passed the gate leading into the park. Not far off, coming slowly along, was Johnny Cave. His head was bent down, and he evidently did not see them.

"Oh, Evelyn, there is Johnny! May I just run and ask him how his mother is now?"

"No: he will be here directly, and then you can speak to him."

Johnny came on in his usual slouching fashion, looking more miserably untidy and dirty than ever.

"Here!" said Sir Evelyn, as he was passing: "how is your mother this evening, my boy?"

The lad eyed him rather askance: he had been accustomed to hear Sir Evelyn Alliston spoken of in no measured terms by his father and his lawless associates, and looked upon him somehow as his natural enemy.

"Why, there aint no use a asking now," he muttered: "her's gone."

"Dead," do you mean?" exclaimed Evelyn, shocked.

"Aye, dead," he answered, the tears coming slowly down his cheeks; "and th' neighbours have been and covered her over wi' a sheet, and say she won't speak to me again, never no more; and father's away!" and he fairly broke down, and burst into tears. Willy was almost as bad too.

"Poor child!" said Sir Evelyn, as he opened the gate. "Come up with us to the house now, and have something to eat, and stay there a little if you like."

Johnny obeyed, though a little doubtfully; but Willy's presence seemed to reassure him. They walked on, and when they got back Sir Evelyn pointed Johnny to a seat; and then, taking Willy with him, went in search of Mrs. Humphreys. He told her how they had found him, and that his mother was dead.

"Poor little lad! I'll go and see to him myself, Mr. Evelyn: I daresay he hasn't had much to eat to-day," and the kind soul bustled off. Willy felt happy about him now.

"How funny it seems to hear her call you 'Mr. Evelyn,'" said Willy, as they walked down the hall together: "no one else does, do they?"

"No, I suppose not," answered Evelyn, laughing: "but you see dear old Mrs. Humphreys lived here before I was born, so she looks upon me quite as her own child, and lectures me well when she thinks I don't take proper care of myself. She was housekeeper here when my mother came home as a bride."

"I have often heard her talk of your mother, Evelyn. She was very beautiful, wasn't she?"

"She was, indeed," he answered thoughtfully. The memory of his mother was still enshrined in his heart, as the type of all that was fair and lovely in woman.

"Have you never seen her picture, Willy? Come this way, and I will show it you."

They went upstairs, and turned down a passage where Willy had never been before, and at last entered a small but extremely pretty room. The windows looked out over the park and south terrace, but the furniture was all covered up. It looked as if it had not been used for many a day. The evening sun was streaming in now, as Evelyn drew aside the curtain from a large picture that hung opposite them. Willy was breathless with awe-struck admiration. Yes, there she was,—the beautiful Lady Maude, of whom he had heard so often. The laughing dark eyes seemed to beam on him with a living light from their wondrous depths; the lips were parted, as if to speak; the chiselled features fresh and fair, as if painted but yesterday, and the glimmer of the satin dress she wore, bright as ever. Evelyn stood gazing at the picture in a sort of abstracted way. It was seldom he could bring

himself to look upon that life-like form, recalling as it did so vividly the days when she had been all in all to him.

“Oh, mother!” he exclaimed involuntarily, as he threw himself down on the nearest seat, and covered his face with his hands. Willy looked at him, wondering: he had never thought of this, and was half afraid.

“Evelyn,” he whispered, going towards him, “oh, I am so sorry I asked you to come! I didn’t know!” and he tried half timidly to take down his hands. “Do look up again, Evelyn!”

At the tone of that last word Sir Evelyn raised his head, and then Willy came into his arms and nestled fondly there, as if he would fain do his little best to comfort him.

“My dear child,” he said at length, “you needn’t be sorry. I like to have come here with you. *You* are my little comforter now, you know,” he added, with strange tenderness in his voice.

“Oh, am I a comfort to you!” exclaimed the child, twining one little arm round his neck. “I know I love you better than anyone else in the whole world, Evelyn, but I didn’t think I could be any good to *you*; I have often wished I was older, that I might.”

“No, my boy, I don’t want you a bit different!” and once again he looked up at the beautiful stately young mother, who would always be young to him.

“I think you are very much like her,” remarked Willy, after a pause, during which he had been half-unconsciously studying the line of Evelyn’s profile, and comparing the two faces, the one in his eyes quite as perfect as the other: “and she was very good, too, wasn’t she?”

"Yes, indeed she was! Ah," he added, as if to himself, "if she had lived, I might have been a better man: but it's all over now!"

"Oh, but dear Evelyn," exclaimed Willy, earnestly, "think where she is now, and how she will want you there! Oh, I'm glad, so very glad to know that she was a Christian!" and he folded his hands, and drew a deep breath as he spoke.

"Why do you feel so, Willy?" asked his brother, half-amused at his innocent earnestness.

"Because," he faltered timidly,—"because perhaps I shall see her some day, and I know how very very much she must have wished you to be one too; didn't she, Evelyn?"

Evelyn was silent. Willy's face was hidden; he was half-afraid he had gone too far, but he thought he was not displeased by the caressing clasp in which he still lay. It was the first time he had said so much, but it was not the first time that his childish words had come strangely home to his brother's heart. That simple question had stirred a feeling within that was never entirely silenced more.

CHAPTER VI.

Unbent before the winter's rugged blast,
Unsoiled by the world's sad and tainted air,
It sparkles out to meet us as we pass :
Bright, 'mid the brightest ; 'mid the fairest, fair !

THE months passed on, and Christmas came round with all its time-honoured festivities. Alliston was again full of guests ; the great rooms all thrown open : blazing fires and good cheer abounding everywhere. Willy was lost in astonishment at all he saw : he had never dreamed of anything like the almost princely hospitalities of his English home. Among the visitors were Lord and Lady Liscombe ; or rather, as they had now become since the old Earl's death, Earl and Countess Rythesdale. Their two daughters were with them : Lady Constance and Lady Ida Liscombe,—fair, joyous girls of eighteen and nineteen. The eldest son was abroad this year ; the youngest—Aylmer,—with his regiment in India. Willy had never seen any of them before ; but he and his “aunt,”—as Lady Rythesdale made him call her, though there was no actual relationship between them,—soon became fast friends. She was charmed with his innocent simplicity and sweetness, and he seemed on his part equally fascinated by her high-bred gentleness and grace. Lady Cairne's ill-concealed dislike of her was increased by this. She

was out of all patience, as she said, at the ridiculous fuss she made with Willy. However, she and Evelyn, too, would find out their mistake some day, when they saw the result of all their spoiling! Of course Willy could not be so much with Evelyn now as usual, for the latter had very constant calls on his time and attention as host, especially as there was hunting two or three times a week, and he was always out; so the little bits of time he did get with him were doubly precious. There were two other boys staying in the house now,—nephews of Lady Cairne,—Lewis and James Murray: they were spending their holidays with her, as they had done several times during Sir Hugh's life-time. They were several years older than Willy, and very much inclined to tyrannize over him in various ways. In former days they had been used to have everything pretty much their own way: they found this somewhat more difficult to accomplish with Sir Evelyn to the fore, and in consequence revenged themselves on Willy whenever opportunity offered. His earnest desire and efforts to be friendly with them ought to have won for him different treatment; but they were thoroughly jealous, not only of his position in the house as Sir Evelyn's brother, but of the unvarying love and happy confidence that subsisted between the two. Too far they dared not venture, lest they should be found out; and Willy was willing to bear a good deal rather than get them into trouble; but it cost him many a struggle and many a prayer: the victory came in due time!

On Christmas Eve there was a large party for dinner. The two Murrays, at Lady Cairne's special request, dined downstairs that night, so it was rather an ordeal for Willy to come in afterwards all alone into the

spacious brilliantly-lighted room, with so many strange faces round him. He came straight to Evelyn, and from his side stood enjoying the dazzling scene. The glitter of silver and glass, the magnificent hot-house flowers and fruit, the splendid centre-piece, with its festoons of holly and miseltoe, the gay dresses and bright faces round the table, combined to make as true an English Christmas picture as ever eye beheld. From her distant seat Lady Rythesdale smiled and nodded to him. Grace Eversley made him come to her side for a moment; and then Mr. Wyndham, of whom mention has before been made, and who had quite won Willy's heart by making him a little ship that would actually sail, took forcible possession of him as he passed. He came softly back to Evelyn, though, at last, as if the place he loved best was by his side.

"How wonderfully like his mother he grows," remarked Mrs. Randolph, who happened to be sitting near. "How well I remember her. I should think Willy must seem more like a child to you than a brother: does'nt he, Sir Evelyn?" she added, smiling.

"Yes: I often call him 'my child,'" he replied, looking fondly down at him. "I assure you I feel quite patriarchal beside him."

Certainly at that moment Willy looked such a child as any elder brother might reasonably be proud of. There was a flush on his cheek and an unusual brilliancy in his eye; and the velvet dress he wore set off to perfection the delicately-cut features and golden hair. Altogether, something in his appearance that night, as he stood there encircled by Sir Evelyn's arm, drew many eyes to that end of the table. Those two made

a picture that was long after remembered by several of those Christmas guests.

There were to be charades after dinner, so the ladies soon withdrew. Evelyn was holding open the door for them, when Willy whispered, as he passed out last, "Good night, Evelyn: I suppose I shall not see you again."

Sir Evelyn glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"Well, it's almost your time now, is'n't it? but to-night, as it's Christmas Eve, you may stay up longer: till I tell you to go," he added, laughing and pinching his cheek. "Will that do, eh?"

How delighted he was. "Oh, thank you, Evelyn! then I shall see the beautiful things you are going to do," and he skipped away into the drawing-room, while Evelyn returned to his seat, thinking at how very small a cost he had conferred so much pleasure! A little while after, as Willy was standing beside Lady Rythesdale, looking at a bracelet which contained a miniature of her bright-faced boy Aylmer, Lady Cairne hurried in from the other drawing-room.

"Now, Willy, it's past your bedtime: come, go directly."

"Oh, but Aunt Cairne," he exclaimed joyfully, "Evelyn says I may stay up longer to-night, so I shall see the charades after all! Isn't it kind of him?"

Lady Cairne muttered something about "absurd indulgence," as she turned away; and James and Lewis Murray, who had several times exulted over Willy in the prospect of their seeing them after he had gone, looked rather small. Soon the gentlemen came in, and then those who were going to act disappeared. Presently all the rest were summoned to the library, Willy

keeping close by Lady Rythesdale, for he hardly understood what was going to happen. The scenes were all historical: the first, Lady Jane Grey's refusal of the English crown. She stood in the centre of the group, dressed in the quaint picturesque fashion of the olden time; an earnest, half-regretful, half-determined look on her fair brow, as she resisted the eager pleading of her youthful spouse, Lord Guildford Dudley, represented by Harry Wyndham. The look of intreaty in his face, —was it altogether feigned? At any rate the flush on Grace's cheek seemed to deepen for a moment, but the scene was an exciting one: let it pass. At her feet knelt the Dukes of Suffolk and Northumberland,—Captain Melville and a Mr. Lindsay, of whom more anon. Laura and Lady Constance represented the two Duchesses, as they also used every argument to induce the ill-fated young bride to accept the dangerous crown. The curtain fell on her reluctant, tearful consent, gained at last. The next scene was the knighthood of Sir Walter Raleigh, and need not be minutely described. The third and last was the *chef d'œuvre* of the whole: it was the intercession of Queen Philippa for the condemned defenders of Calais. Towering above them all stood Edward Plantagenet, in his regal robes. Sir Evelyn had been at once chosen for this, on account of his superior height; for though Harry Wyndham had indignantly asserted, in answer to Mabel's teasing, that five feet eleven was a stature by no means to be despised, there was no doubt that Sir Evelyn's additional two inches gave him superior claims. Willy was almost afraid: the martial attire, the commanding attitude, and the stern expression of his eye, half made him doubt if it could be really Evelyn. At the feet of

the Monarch knelt the Queen, so disguised by her courtly dress and the old-fashioned head-gear, which hid away her wealth of sunny hair, that it was difficult to recognise the Lady Ida. The loveliness of the suppliant, the pathos of her pleading, the terrible resolve of her royal spouse, and the noble bearing of the gallant Eustace de St. Pierre and his brave colleagues, formed a picture not easily to be forgotten; and as the words burst at last from the lips of Edward, "Dame, I can deny you nothing!" and the halters were triumphantly taken from the necks of the doomed patriots, the curtain fell amid quite a furor of applause. When the actors reappeared in the drawing-room, they were warmly congratulated on their performance. Evelyn threw himself down on an ottoman beside Lady Rythesdale, declaring that he was glad to be rid of regal restraints and dignity; and then Willy stole to his side, and softly drew his arm round him, as if to assure himself of his identity. Lady Rythesdale smiled as she noticed this, but made no remark.

The next morning, when Willy came in to breakfast, three Christmas presents awaited him: a beautiful little Skye terrier from Grace Eversley, with the single word "Mop" engraved on the collar; a writing-desk with silver fittings, and his initials on the outside, from Lady Rythesdale; and a book from Evelyn, full of illustrations of travels and adventures. His delight cannot be told; he could hardly tear himself away from his treasures, even to come to the table. They all went to church afterwards. It was a brilliant frosty morning; the old church was gay with holly and ivy, and wreaths of scarlet berries. Willy could just see it all, over the top of the old-fashioned pew, as he stood on a foot-stool

by Evelyn's side to look over the same hymn-book. Once, half unconsciously, his eyes were raised to his, as the sweet words of the "angels' song" floated by, as if with the longing to know that he, too, was sharing the only real joy of that holy time,—the assurance that the Saviour, whose lowly birth they that day commemorated, was indeed his own. The look was not lost upon his brother, though the child did not know it. Mr. Randolph's sermon that day Willy never forgot. By the end of the week all the guests had left Alliston, —with the exception of Mr. Wyndham and the two Murrays. Somehow it seemed as if these two and Willy had less and less in common as time went on. There was much in them that he could not but disapprove of,—to say nothing of their very unconciliating conduct towards himself. They seemed to take a pride in seeing how far they could evade all authority; and, after deliberately disregarding Lady Cairne's most stringent commands, would endeavour, by any amount of subterfuge and prevarication, to escape being found out. Willy was so accustomed to conceal nothing from Evelyn that he could not understand it. They often laughed at him for being such a little fool, as they termed it. We shall see which was the safest policy in the end. Here it may be observed, that although Sir Evelyn always encouraged Willy to come to him with everything, he did not allow him to consider that the mere confession of a fault was to preclude all penalties: his idea of justice was very different from that, and Willy perfectly understood it. A little incident that occurred about this time may be mentioned in proof of this. A frost had set in with great severity, and the great pool in the park was frozen: skating of course began; and

Willy, who was having his first lessons from Evelyn, enjoyed it thoroughly. It was a splendid day: the ice was covered with sliders and skaters. Lady Cairne, however, with Laura and the two Murrays, were out for the day. Sir Evelyn, with his friend Harry Wyndham and Willy, had just returned to the ice after lunch, when the latter, who had got on his skates and was just beginning to start, happened to put his hand into his pocket, and there found a note that Evelyn had given him the day before to take to Mr. Randolph! He had entirely forgotten it, and now was in great dismay; for he had several times been reproved by his brother for carelessness in little things, and he had told him that the next time he transgressed he must take notice of it. For a moment the temptation was strong to send someone up to the Rectory, and say nothing: but Willy's conscience would not allow that! He went straight up to Evelyn.

"Evelyn," he said, timidly, "I quite forgot that note to Mr. Randolph that you gave me yesterday: I'm very sorry!"

"Oh, Willy, that was very careless! How did you know of what consequence it might be?"

"I am very sorry!" he repeated, his eyes filling with tears.

"So am I; for you remember what I said last time. I am particularly sorry to do it now, but you must learn to be more careful; so now you will have to take the note up to the Rectory yourself, and then go and stay in your own room instead of coming down here again."

Poor Willy! this was indeed a penalty: a dreadful one it seemed to him. He had been so thoroughly

enjoying his skating, it was very hard to leave it now. He said nothing, however, but asked George,—one of the footmen, who was his special attendant,—to take off the skates that he had only just put on. The latter looked much surprised; but seeing that he had hard work to speak at all, he supposed that something was wrong, as he had just seen Sir Evelyn speaking to him. He was very much attached to his little charge; and as he felt a tear fall on his hand while he was unfastening the strap, he could not help thinking, privately, that if it *was* his master who had spoiled his pleasure in this way, it was very hard! But Sir Evelyn was quite as sorry himself, if he had only known it. Willy's instant though timid confession of his fault, had touched him considerably, and especially the way in which he had taken his disappointment,—no sulking, or pouting, or angry looks; and in his heart he wished he could have spared him! He could not help watching him a little: perhaps he guessed why his hand passed so hastily over his eyes, and his head was bent so low. How little Willy knew as he rose up and turned to have one more look at the joyous scene, and especially at one figure among all those swiftly-flying skaters, what yearning, loving eyes had been resting on him not a minute before: *he* seemed to be skimming away then as lightly as any of them. Slowly and sadly he pursued his way to the Rectory, left the note, and then came on to the house. He met nobody, and at last reached his own room. There was a nice fire as usual, and it looked warm and bright; but as he stood at the window, the brilliant winter-sky, the sparkling ground, and in the distance the pool with its busy throng, whose merry shouts and laughter he could faintly hear, made him

feel sadder than ever. No thought of resentment against Evelyn was in his mind, for he knew he had been just in what he had done; and justice to a child is everything! but still it seemed very strange to be there all alone when such fun was going on. He took a book and tried to amuse himself, but somehow he could not get interested in what he read. The afternoon was unspeakably long. Willy did not know how utterly his brother's pleasure had been spoiled too,—how those involuntary childish tears, at his apparently harsh decree, had gone to his heart!

At last, when it became too dark to see out of doors any longer, Willy went and sat down on the hearthrug, and leaning his head against the armchair, fell fast asleep. The housemaid came in presently to shut up the windows and see to the fire, and he awoke quickly. He found it was nearly six o'clock: surely the skating must be over by that time. He sat still for a while, and pondered what he should do all the rest of the evening,—whether he should see Evelyn again or not; and then came back the thought of his displeasure, and altogether he felt very unhappy. Presently he heard him come into his dressing-room, but he knew it could not be to dress then. How he listened to every sound! At last Evelyn opened the door between. Willy was still sitting on the rug; he started up now, not the least knowing what would come next. Evelyn came in and came up to him, and just putting his arm round his shoulders, without a word he stooped down and kissed him. Oh, what a bound the little heart gave at that! The weight seemed gone in a moment; and then Evelyn sat down before the fire, and drew him close to him.

“I cannot tell you, my dear child, how sorry I am

that this has happened to-day; but I think you know that what I did was only just and right after what I said last time."

"Oh, I know," said Willy, brokenly, "and I am very sorry; but it doesn't seem half so bad now that you aren't angry still: I have been feeling so afraid of that all afternoon!" and he laid his head down on his brother's shoulder as he spoke.

"No: I did not feel like being angry when I saw how you took what I said, especially after you had told me yourself. I always meet confession half way, as you know, though that does not do away with all penalties; and this forgetfulness, though it is not like many other faults, must be overcome. It brings often so much trouble, and even danger with it, if it is not checked in time."

And then he went on to tell him of all the people who were coming to-morrow, and the grand day's skating they should have, as it was still freezing hard. Soon after the gong sounded, and he went back to his room, taking Willy with him as usual. He came eagerly enough, and was so bright and happy,—so evidently relieved at his brother's restored kindness, that the latter was quite struck. It had been a little question with him that afternoon, whether the child would easily get over his keen disappointment,—whether he would have any feeling of malice towards himself for the sudden check he had given to his pleasure. He was perfectly reassured on that point now.

The next day arose cloudless and bright, and soon a large party had assembled,—among them were of course the Eversleys. Now Grace was a very fair skater, but sometimes it happened that she needed a little

assistance. Singularly enough whenever this was the case, Harry Wyndham was sure to be within sight and call ; once a strap wanted tightening, and he brought up a chair immediately, and seating her in it proceeded to bore a new hole with great care : it certainly took a very long time, but perhaps was not so easy as it looked ! As to Mabel, she had only tried skating once before, and was very helpless. Sir Evelyn instructed her patiently, and she could soon stand alone. After that he would occasionally withdraw his hand, and skating off to a little distance, graciously invite her to follow.

"Oh, Evelyn," she exclaimed, hopelessly, "I can't come : I daren't !"

"Try," he answered, laughing at her frantic attempts to "strike" properly ; "never mind a few falls !"

"Oh, please !" she cried, as she nearly lost her balance : "I was all but down then ! Evelyn, I'll never be saucy to you again, if you'll only come and fetch me !"

"Ah, wait till you're on *terra firma*, and independent of me. I havn't much opinion of your promises now !"

"Willy, will you come and just give me your hand ? do !"

"No, no, Willy !" shouted Evelyn : "don't go, on any account."

So Willy could only hover near, as much amused as Evelyn at Mabel's distress. The latter went to her again after that, and she soon began to gain more courage. Next day she improved still more ; but alas, that very night a thaw set in, and soon the ice-bound waters were sparkling and dancing again, as if rejoicing in their regained freedom. Those bright days of skating, when they had been on the ice almost from morning

till night, were stereotyped for ever in Willy's memory. One day, soon after, the Murrays had some friends of their own to see them ; they were just their own sort, and Willy felt in the midst of their noisy play that he was hardly wanted. So he stole away to his room, where the bright fire seemed to invite him to stay, and taking the book Evelyn had given him on Christmas Day, began again to look over the pictures. But gradually his thoughts wandered away to the old manse, and his life there. This beginning of the New Year had recalled past days : he wondered what they were all doing, and whether they ever thought of him, and then came the contrast of his present life. How much he had come to love his beautiful English home ; how kind almost everybody was to him ! and Evelyn : what should he do without him now ? Almost unconsciously his thoughts resolved themselves into a little word of earnest thanksgiving for all that surrounded him, and especially for Evelyn's love, which seemed to him, as in truth it was, the crown and sunshine of his little life ! Just then he heard his brother's voice calling him, and ran off. Evelyn had come in from hunting, and had thrown himself down, just as he was, on one of the comfortable easy chairs in the library.

" Well young man," he said, as Willy came eagerly to his side, " and where have you been : I looked into the school-room, but couldn't find you ? "

" I was upstairs," he answered simply. " Have you had a good run to-day, Evelyn ? "

" Capital : all round by Brakenhurst and Ellington, and killed at last in Sedgely Hollow. But what were you doing all by yourself, and away from the other boys ? "

"Oh, I was looking at my beautiful book again: I'm never tired of that. And then," rather hesitatingly, "I was thinking."

"What about: nothing that made you unhappy, eh?" Evelyn had more than once fancied that this season might be bringing back old days to him.

"No, indeed," he answered earnestly. "I was thinking how much I had to make me happy. And then, I couldn't help thanking God a little bit for bringing me home to you, Evelyn, and just then you called me."

"My dear child!" exclaimed his brother involuntarily; but for the moment he added no more. The innocent words had gone straight to his heart. He wondered if Willy could at all guess the brightness that had come into his own life since he had come "home" to him, as he called it! At that moment Harry Wyndham came in.

"So you're back first," he said to Evelyn, as he sat down on the other side of the fire. "I missed you coming home."

"Yes: I came back the short way, by Helstone, when Manvers left me. You were with Col. Eversley, were not you?"

"Yes: I rode nearly all the way with him," answered Harry, cheerily. "Oh, by the way I've got something here," and he drew out a small sealed note, which he gave to Willy.

"Oh, Evelyn! it can't be for me: it must be your's!"

"Well, I don't know Willy," he replied gravely, with a glance at his friend: "my letters aren't addressed quite like that, with such a grand 'Esquire.' You'd better open it and see." It was an invitation to a

dinner and Christmas tree at the Priory, for the next Thursday evening.

Willy's eyes sparkled. "Oh, I never saw a Christmas tree in my life! But it's a late dinner, so I suppose you won't let me go, Evelyn?"

"Yes," replied his brother smiling, and stroking his head: "you shall go. Are we asked too, Wyndham?"

"Certainly we are, and the Colonel asked me to go over there in the morning and help choose the tree," he replied, with a look of such infinite satisfaction as the occasion seemed hardly to warrant!

Sir Evelyn laughed. "Then I suppose I needn't expect to see you all day, eh, old boy?" And his tone was somewhat mischievous.

"Oh, yes, I shall come back; but I can't quite tell when." And Harry took up a paper that lay near him and began to read it with great apparent interest.

Willy then ventured to ask, "Are James and Lewis going, Evelyn?"

"I don't know, and I don't much care: those young gentlemen are no special favourites of mine, I can tell you. I don't think I shall have them here again!"

"But they do so like being here!"

"Very possibly: but I wonder you seem to care about it, Willy. I don't fancy they make themselves particularly pleasant to you, eh?" Evelyn knew more on this subject than Willy guessed, but he did not say so then.

"Why, you see they are older than I am, and I don't think they always like the things that I do; but I do hope you will let them come again," he added, half timidly.

" You are a strange child," said Evelyn, smiling as he rose to go upstairs; and the subject dropped.

The Christmas tree at the Priory was a great success. The presents were all good of their kind, but as the ticket for each thing was drawn promiscuously, no one knew what they should get. Willy, to his extreme delight, drew a box of water-colours, containing brushes and palettes.

" Oh, look, Evelyn!" he exclaimed, " is'n't this beautiful? I have so often wanted to colour some of my little pictures: do look?"

Evelyn was almost as much pleased as he was at seeing his pleasure, and examined and praised everything to his heart's content. He had got a handsome leather purse, so he was in luck's way. Harry Wyndham's prize was a doll; and, amid the delighted amusement of the children, he gravely took it in his arms pretending to hush it to sleep. He, however, soon effected a change with little Minnie Kirby, who was in despair at possessing an elaborately worked cigar case. After a time, when the tree was cleared and the bon-bons distributed, the whole party returned to the drawing-room.

" What have you got, Lewis?" asked Willy, finding himself near him.

" Only this," he replied, discontentedly showing a handsomely bound book that he held. " I've been trying to exchange it, but nobody will. And I declare," he added, " you've got that paint-box,—the very thing of all others that I wanted: its too provoking!" and he turned away.

What a struggle went on for a minute in Willy's mind. Lewis had been particularly illnatured to him

that morning, refusing to lend him something of his that he much wanted for a minute. Here was a fine opportunity for putting his principles into practice, and trying to "overcome evil with good." He would try. "Lewis," he said, following him, "I will change with you if you like, and you shall have this."

Lewis opened his eyes in astonishment. "Why don't you care for the box then: do you really want to change?"

"Yes, I do: I dare say I shall like the book very much."

"Very well then, here it is; and the paint-box will be much more useful to me than to you."

Poor Willy! Lewis little guessed the sacrifice he was making. An unbidden tear rose to his eye, but he brushed it hastily away as he gave one thought to his lost treasure. A few minutes after Sir Evelyn chanced to see Lewis Murray busily examining his new possession.

"Why Lewis," he said, "have you one too? That is exactly like Willy's!"

"It is the one he had," answered Lewis, rather doubtfully: "he changed it just now with me for a book."

"Indeed! I wonder how that could have been: he was so very much pleased with it, and said it was just what he wanted."

"He didn't seem to mind," said Lewis sullenly; as he retreated; but in his heart he was wondering how Willy could have done it for him.

After a while Sir Evelyn came upon Willy, and thought he would have a little further explanation.

"Come here Willy," he said: "I want you a moment!"

The child looked up rather anxiously: there was something not quite usual in his tone. He just took

him aside into a little ante-room, where it happened no one was at that time, and asked him what he had done with the paint-box that he had been so pleased to get.

"Lewis liked it very much too," he answered hesitatingly; "so I gave it to him, and he gave me a book in exchange."

"But how was it Willy? I don't understand: I don't suppose you like the book half so well."

"No: but I wanted particularly to do something to please him."

"Why? Because he was so particularly illnatured to you this morning, eh! I happened to hear all that."

"Did you, Evelyn! I thought you were busy with the paper."

"So I was: but I heard notwithstanding. How is it my boy?"

"Why you see, perhaps now he won't think *I* feel unkindly about it; and you know it says we must try to do good even to those that aren't very kind to us. You don't mind, do you?" he added, looking up at him with his earnest eyes.

"No, my dear child; I don't mind, except for your own sake, though I can hardly understand it even now. It was your own, and you had a right to do as you liked."

"I am so glad," said Willy, with a half smile: "I was almost afraid when you called me that you were vexed about something."

"Not with you at any rate," replied his brother kindly. Just then they heard Grace's voice calling him to come and make up the number of a game; and he ran off.

Sir Evelyn was greatly struck with his conduct in this little affair; and Lewis, for once, was thoroughly ashamed of himself. Perhaps after all, Willy was the most entirely satisfied of the three! Even though the sacrifice he had made seemed so little appreciated by his companion, he had the happy consciousness of having tried at least to please his Master in heaven: and the thought of His loving approval was joy to his little heart. The pleasant evening came to an end at last. A few days after, and the Murrays left for school, and Willy's lessons with Mr. Randolph began again. They had been very happy holidays; but his school life was not an irksome one: he had his afternoons with Evelyn, and whetherindoors or out, to be with him was quite enough for Willy. His gentle kindness was unvarying, and the child repaid it with the fulness of his young heart's love; it was seldom that even the shadow of a cloud came between them. No event of any importance occurred at Alliston now for several months. The next that need be recorded was when April days were getting bright and warm, and winter had entirely passed away.

CHAPTER VII.

“ When we are sad, where can we turn for succour ?
When we are wretched, where can we complain ?
When our heart’s treasured ones look coldly on us,
Where can we go to ease our bosom’s pain ? ”

ONE day early in April, Sir Evelyn chanced to take up the *Times* after luncheon, and exclaimed hurriedly, as his eye caught a name on the first column, “ Dear me : I am very sorry to see this. Poor Wyndham ! ”

“ What is it ? ” asked Lady Cairne : “ anything happened to him ? ”

“ No ; but I see he has just lost his mother : very suddenly too. Poor fellow ! I almost wonder I have not heard from him ; but I suppose he has had time for nothing yet.”

“ Is it my Mr. Wyndham, ” asked Willy ; “ the one that was so kind to me at Christmas, and made me the ship ? ”

“ Yes ; it’s Harry Wyndham, ” replied his brother. “ Poor fellow ! his home will be broken up now ; for he was the only child, and his father has been dead for years. I wonder what he will do : at any rate he shall come here as soon as he likes.”

Harry was his greatest friend, and he knew how to feel for him in this sorrow. That afternoon as Firefly and Snowdrop, with their respective riders, were passing the

Priory gates, they met the two Eversleys, and Mrs. Wilton just coming out. They stopped as a matter of course. Mabel was beginning to rally Evelyn on his grave looks, when he remarked.—

“By the way, have you heard about poor Wyndham? I only saw it in the *Times* of to-day!”

“No: what?” exclaimed Emma Wilton and Mabel in a breath; Grace was just then bending so low over Snowdrop’s head-gear that perhaps she did not hear.

Evelyn explained; adding, “I have written to him, and asked him to come to Alliston as soon as he liked. I thought it would do him good.”

“The best thing in the world for him,” said Mrs. Wilton. “Poor fellow! he will feel it very much: he always seemed so attached to her.”

“Yes,” remarked Mabel: “how he did talk of her last time he was here.”

Grace seemed to find something very attractive about Snowdrop, for she never lifted her head till the adieus were exchanged, and Evelyn and Willy rode on.

“I wonder what was the matter with Grace, to-day,” remarked the latter. “She hardly spoke once, and she looked so very white: didn’t you think so Evelyn?”

“I didn’t notice it; we were talking so much of Mr. Wyndham. But take care, my boy; you’ve got your reins wrong again!”

“Oh, dear, how stupid I am: I do so forget! Is that right?”

“Yes, quite! take them up well: and now for a canter.”

Through the soft spring twilight, over the turf they cantered on, nearly all the way till they reached home.

How Willy enjoyed these rides with Evelyn: he was so gentle with him, so kind and patient in his teaching, that he thought there could not be a pleasanter thing in the world than to ride so by his side.

At last came a letter from Harry Wyndham, to say that he would be at Alliston on the evening of the following day. "I am afraid you will find me but a dull companion, my dear old fellow!" he wrote; "but I had rather be with you than anywhere else, so expect me to-morrow." Next day he got into the train, and was, as he thought, fortunate enough to have secured a carriage all to himself. His feet were comfortably reposing on the opposite seat, covered with his rug, and he was congratulating himself that he was not likely to be disturbed now, when the door opened, and another gentleman entered. "Hallo, Wyndham!" exclaimed a fine cheery voice. "Is it you?" And the new comer shook hands with him warmly. "Lord Rythesdale! who would have thought of meeting you here?" said Harry in astonishment. "Where are you off to?"

"I am running down to Oxford to see a young scapegrace nephew of mine, who seems to have come to grief in some way or other. I couldn't quite make it out, so I thought I'd better go and look him up. And where are *you* going, may I ask?"

"Why, Alliston has asked me to stay with him again. He's the very best and kindest friend a man ever had: and just now of course I feel it especially."

"Ah! I was so sorry to hear of your loss," replied Lord Rythesdale. "Well, at any rate Evelyn will do his best for you: he *is* a good fellow, as you say. I don't think I ever knew a young man in his position so utterly unspoiled, and yet filling it so well in every

way. I wish, by the way, you'd tell him to remember his promise of coming to the Towers this summer; it's more than a year since he was with us there."

"Certainly I will: but I rather fancy he is more at home now on account of his little brother; he does not much like to trust him too long to my Lady C's tender mercies I imagine!"

"Probably not: that is not at all surprising. But how good he is: it is so seldom one sees a great strong fellow like Evelyn, so thoughtful and gentle with a little child. Be sure you tell him he is to bring Willy, too; my wife took an extraordinary fancy to him when she was at Alliston: she used to get quite enraged at my Lady's unkind behaviour to him. I do hope," continued Lord Rythesdale, energetically, "that Evelyn will soon take to himself a wife, and get rid of her. I'm sure he has done his duty to her now!"

"I wish he would, I'm sure," replied Harry; "but I've never heard anything that seemed to point that way at all."

"Haven't you? Well, then of course you must not mention it; but I do rather fancy from what I hear, that there is something on the tapis now. I believe he is all but engaged to one of those Miss Eversleys, though they have not announced it yet. You know who I mean? They were often at Alliston while we were there at Christmas."

"Yes, I know," replied Harry quietly.

"I sincerely hope it is so," pursued his Lordship; "they are charming girls. He might have looked higher certainly: but I believe it would be for his real happiness."

"Which of them is it?" asked Harry, in a rather low voice.

"Oh, not the widow! and of course not the young one. Its the second,—Grace is her name,—the one with those bewitching dark eyes!"

"Yes: that's the name of the second." But Harry just then found no more to say. His companion drew out his *Times*, and he did the same, but what progress he made in the perusal of it need not be told, seeing that he was holding it for a long time, quite unconsciously, upside down. Poor Harry! it seemed as if a dark cloud had suddenly overshadowed him. It was of no use trying to hide it from himself: he knew now that he loved Grace Eversley,—truly, deeply loved her; and yet how could he have been blind so long? Was it not the most natural thing in the world that she and Evelyn should have become attached to each other: sharing as they did so many tastes and pursuits, and so constantly thrown together. How in fact could it be otherwise? No: he could not wonder; and yet he had fancied that she had not been altogether indifferent to him: but that could only have been fancy. Besides, he knew well enough that he could in no way offer to Grace what Evelyn could. What a position his wife would occupy! And with his own enthusiastic admiration for his friend, he could not imagine any woman proof against his love.

No doubt there had long been an understanding between them: he could recall many little proofs of this; and her manner to himself had been but the sort of sisterly one that his intimate friendship with Evelyn would naturally permit of. Well, at any rate, no one knew of his secret, and no one ever should know. But how different was the anticipation of arriving at Alliston, to that which it had been in the morning! The idea of

seeing Grace again: of being near her,—with her, had attracted him perhaps more than he knew. He had half dreamed of ascertaining his fate this time, though he feared the opposition of her father. He had come now into the possession of his small patrimony; but it might be wholly insufficient in his eyes. However, there was no need to think of all this now. How changed everything seemed! The sight of the well-known carriage at the Overstone Station brought an almost sickening feeling of hopelessness and despair. Lord Rythesdale put his head out to see if Evelyn might have come, but there was only the carriage.

“I dare say he is better employed this beautiful day,” laughed his Lordship, as he shook hands with Harry: “but mind you don’t say a word, it might annoy him, till it is announced; but you may be sure it’s true. Just look at those horses,” he added; “what splendid fellows they are! Evelyn knows something about horseflesh at any rate. Good-bye; and don’t forget my message to him.

“Good-bye,” said Harry: “I shall remember.”

And then, as the train moved on, Lord Rythesdale seated himself comfortably again, and thought no more of what had passed. Little he guessed what sorrow to more than one young heart his chance words had caused. Is it not often so? We know not what daggers we sometimes thrust into the bosom of our nearest and dearest, by some accidental word,—some careless remark. The smile may linger on the lip and the light in the eye, when the sunshine has died suddenly out of the heart. Well for those who in moments like these can cast their burden on the loving heart of “Him who knows all, and loves us better than He knows.”

Meanwhile Harry Wyndham was pursuing his way to Alliston. Just as the carriage reached the house, Sir Evelyn rode in at the other gate. How handsome he looked, was his friend's involuntary thought: how worthy of any woman's love! His greeting, too, was so full of genuine kindness and sympathy; he could never feel differently to him, though, all unconsciously he had become his rival in the dearest wish of his heart. They entered the house together, and Evelyn was struck by Harry's exceedingly sad, dejected look. Little he knew whence the last and darkest cloud had come.

They were walking up and down the terrace later in evening, when Willy came running up the steps on his way from the Rectory: he had stayed on for some cricket practice with his school-fellows, as Evelyn was away.

"How that child grows!" exclaimed Harry. "And I declare I think he gets jollier-looking every time I see him: but he does not look over strong, Alliston."

"No," replied his brother, rather anxiously: "he has had a tiresome little cough lately; but its nearly gone now. The warm days will soon set him to rights again."

"Oh, have you come back?" cried Willy, as he caught sight of Mr. Wyndham. "I'm so glad!" And the greeting that followed was so warm on both sides, that Evelyn was considerably amused.

At dinner that night Evelyn chanced to remark that he was to lunch at the Priory next day, as he had some business with Col. Eversley.

"You'll come, of course?" he said to Harry. "They quite expect you, and it will be only a family party you know."

How inadvertently the words were spoken, but they went like a knife to his heart. Of course Evelyn would say so naturally enough. But no: try as he would, he could not yet bring himself to look upon his great happiness. Perhaps after a time it would seem easier.

"No: I think not to-morrow," he replied. "But don't you mind about me: we have plenty of work for to-morrow, haven't we, young man?" and he turned to Willy, who had just come in.

"Oh, will you really mend my ship for me to-morrow? How kind of you! I will be back in good time."

"But why should you bother yourself about that?" asked Evelyn. "Willy can wait: and you aren't going to run away!"

"But I like to do it for him: it is just what will suit me, I assure you."

Just then the ladies rose to retire.

"Evelyn!" said Willy presently, in rather a hesitating voice, "I had almost forgotten: but Grace gave me this for you this afternoon. I didn't quite forget," he added coaxingly, as his brother took the little three cornered note from his hand.

"Well, ~~not quite~~;" answered Evelyn, beginning to read it. "Ah, that's all right." And a contented smile, as Harry thought, came over his face. "What time did you see her, Willy?"

"About four I think," he replied, quite reassured by the tone of his voice; "just as we were passing Ayton Cliff. She said she had only written a line because she should see you to-morrow."

The next day, finding that Harry was really in earnest in his wish to stay behind, Evelyn went without him.

He could not help thinking it a little strange, intimate as he was with the Eversleys, that he should feel any scruple in going there. However, he supposed the feeling would wear off in time, and meanwhile it was best to let him do exactly as he felt inclined. Willy came back in good time, and the two went at once to Evelyn's lathe room, where were tools of all kinds, and soon both were as busy as possible.

"I suppose you very often see the Eversleys, don't you, Willy?" asked Mr. Wyndham, casually, in the course of the afternoon.

"Yes: we see them nearly every day. They come here, or we stop at the Priory when we come back from riding."

"And what do you do generally?"

"Oh, Evelyn talks to Gracie a great deal; because he tells her all about the new cottages he is building, and the things he does in the gardens: so Mabel and I go to the ferns, or the doves; and sometimes we water the flowers, or feed the swans. Evelyn has been making a new rose-garden lately," he added, "and Gracie has done all the designs for him. It is so pretty, with arches of roses and little winding paths. Won't you come and look at it? it's close by."

"I will some time," replied Mr. Wyndham: and so the talk ended.

Meanwhile, in the sunny morning room at the Priory, Mrs. Eversley and her daughters were sitting at their usual avocations, reading and working. Grace happened to be nearest the window. She was looking remarkably well in her softly-coloured dress, just relieved by the bright blue ribbon that bound her rich hair. A few primroses were in her belt; for Grace was rarely seen

without a flower of some kind about her: winter and summer it was almost a joke against her that she always found something in the shape of a leaf or a flower to wear. Just now her work did not appear to engross her very specially: her eyes often wandered out over the garden, and beyond to where the road might easily be seen. All at once they drooped low, and a slight flush rose to her cheek.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Mabel, as the sound of horses' hoofs was heard outside.

"Oh, no: it's only Evelyn. Mr. Wyndham can't be at Alliston then;" and she ran out as usual to caress her favourite Firefly. Sir Evelyn entered.

"I could not persuade Wyndham to come with me," he said to Mrs. Eversley after they had shaken hands, "though I told him you would be alone. Perhaps, poor fellow, he will feel more up to things after awhile: he looks quite ill now."

"I am very sorry," she replied. "I should have thought he would have felt enough at home with us not to mind."

"So I thought, and so I told him; but he would not be persuaded. Look, Grace," he added, turning to her: "this is the design you wanted for that last border."

But Grace had vanished.

"Why, she was here a moment ago," remarked her mother: "where can she have flown to?"

Poor little Grace, she had somewhat hastily retreated, —ostensibly, to get something for her work; really, to keep down the choking feeling at her heart caused by Evelyn's words. Almost unconsciously she had been anticipating a certain meeting that morning with strange

joy: and now, to think that he was so near and yet had not come, how could it be? and why should he treat them as if they were strangers? Well, at any rate, she must not stay there; so she returned again to the drawing-room as soon as she could, and entered with great apparent interest into the design Sir Evelyn had brought for her approval. Mabel thought her rather silent that afternoon as they walked together; but as she appeared just as usual at dinner, she supposed it had only been her fancy.

Business with Col. Eversley occupied Evelyn several hours after lunch: when he got back he found Willy busily sailing his ship in the great basin of the fountain on the lawn.

"Look, Evelyn!" he exclaimed eagerly: "doesn't it sail well? Mr. Wyndham has mended it so beautifully for me."

"I see. How kind he is to you! Where is he now?"

"He went for a walk about half-an-hour ago. I asked him if I should come with him; but he said he liked being by himself."

"Come and see how your ship sails on the pool," said Evelyn: "you'll have more room there."

Joyfully Willy assented; and very pretty the tiny craft looked as she glided out in full sail over the smooth water. The string he held it by went out farther and farther, till she looked like a little white speck in the distance.

"Isn't it like a real ship, Evelyn?" cried Willy with delight. "I wish Mr. Wyndham was here to see it."

Just as they were leaving the pool he joined them.

"So you came here after all?" he said to Willy.
"And how did she go?"

"Oh, so beautifully! I did so wish you were here."

"Well: but you would not come with me. It's quite true," he added to Evelyn, as Willy ran on to put his ship away. "I tried all sorts of arguments, but it was no use. You had told him never to go beyond the gravel walk; and though he was longing to see his ship sail, I believe cart ropes would not have drawn him."

Evelyn smiled. "I quite believe that; though, of course, I only meant when he was alone: he certainly might have gone with you. But my word is law to him, I think, whether I am present or absent. I really have to be quite careful how I lay commands upon him."

"How is it, Alliston? I have often noticed it: and yet he seems so devoted to you; not a bit as if you ruled him by fear."

"No: I don't think I do that. It certainly is more love than fear; and yet I have never spoilt him. But there is one thing I have sometimes wondered about with regard to that child. Now and then I have almost thought that neither his love for me *nor* his fear would make him do anything that he fancied to be wrong: not that we have ever come into collision yet; but I want to get him out of some of his strange notions if I can."

"Oh, if you mean religious scruples and fancies, no doubt he will grow out of them in time. I wouldn't try to root them out too roughly; it only makes them take firmer hold."

"No, I don't wish to force him; but of course I

could not possibly give way, if once I were in earnest, for his own sake."

Just then the little subject of their conversation reappeared; and as Evelyn's arm passed fondly round his shoulders as he walked by his side, it did not seem that much else than love subsisted between these two.

"Did Mabel send me any message about the doves, Evelyn?" he asked, presently. "She promised to tell me how many came."

"No, she didn't: but I didn't see much of *her*. They were all so sorry, Wyndham, that you would not come. Mrs. Eversley said she hardly thought you would look upon them as strangers in this way, after you had been there so much."

"They are very kind," he replied, rather absently: "I will go some day."

"Willy," said his brother, after a pause, "Grace and I have quite finished the design for the end of the rose garden now. She liked the one I took her to-day very much; we have turned the little walk round into the shrubbery."

"Oh, that will be very pretty: may we go and look at it now?"

"No, my boy, it is getting too late for you to be out. You shall come with me to-morrow."

When the morrow came, and in fact as several days passed on, Evelyn perceived with sorrow, that his friend did not at all regain his usual spirits: he looked thin and pale, and all his own anxious attempts to cheer or amuse him seemed to fail. As long as they were quite alone he was comparatively himself, but any proposal to go anywhere, or see people when they came, he seemed to shrink from strangely. If Evelyn had to

leave him, he seemed always content if he might have Willy.

"Do ride with me this afternoon," urged the former, one day: "it will do you good, and then we can stop at the Priory as we come back, and make the girls admit us to their 'five o'clock.' That can't be called visiting you know."

But Harry could not bear it *yet*.

"No: I think I won't to-day, thank you;" he replied, as cheerfully as he could. "I'll take Willy a walk, if you are going too far for him."

And so the matter ended. What was it that drew the hitherto spirited, dashing young officer to the little child, and made him delight in his companionship? Perhaps it was the fresh unsullied purity and simplicity that hung around Willy, and contrasted so with the men and manners to which he had been accustomed, that he found so refreshing. Perhaps it was the gentle, timid attempts he sometimes made to lead him to think of the Hand whence all joy and sorrow comes, though he little guessed the bitterness of his present grief. His simple words had a very soothing effect sometimes. Any direct stereotyped forms of comfort would have failed utterly. It was the half deprecating childish manner, and the knowledge that the little one at his side had not the faintest idea of what was really the cause of his unusual depression. An older and more experienced companion might easily have detected something more than the mere natural grief for the loss of a parent: but with Willy he felt safe. When with Evelyn himself he had a strange mingling of feelings, that at times almost unconsciously showed itself.

A bitter pang would shoot across his breast as he

saw him in the full enjoyment, as he supposed, of the happiness that *he* would give his very life but to hope for, and the next moment he would as bitterly accuse himself of ingratitude and injustice towards his friend, and be filled with remorse at having ever indulged an ungenerous thought of him. Evelyn was often curiously perplexed, but made every allowance for his present mood, and endeavoured in all ways to anticipate his wishes; till at last, Harry, touched beyond words at his patient, unselfish kindness, which he knew must seem so often unworthily received, resolved to make the effort he felt must be made some time, whatever it might cost him. It happened one afternoon that he had agreed to ride with Evelyn and Willy to Overstone and back, as the former had some business there. It was Willy's birthday, and as in returning they were passing the Priory gates, he suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, Evelyn, do let us go in for a minute! I should so like to see Grace and Mabel to-day, and show them my new whip that you gave me this morning."

Evelyn at once looked his refusal, and hoped that his friend had not heard; but Harry, who was a little behind, said, "Oh, yes, Alliston: let him go. I'm coming too," he added, with an attempt at a smile, as Evelyn looked round in surprise.

"That's right!" exclaimed the latter: "How glad they will be to see you. I hope they are at home."

Harry earnestly hoped not. But yes: there on the lawn they all were,—Colonel and Mrs. Eversley walking about together, just returned from their usual drive, and Grace and Mabel busy among the flower beds.

"Why, here come Evelyn and Willy," cried Mabel, "and Mr. Wyndham, too. You'd better come Grace,"

she added, as she rose from her knees. "Perhaps they are going to stay."

Grace, however, lingered; she needed a moment to still the beating of her foolish little heart, and then she followed her sister. They had dismounted, and the servants were leading away the horses, so there was no hurry. She shook hands with Sir Evelyn, and then, for one instant, her eyes met those of Harry Wyndham fixed upon her in a way that made her almost quail. What was it? Such a strange mingling of reproach, tenderness, and grief, as perfectly bewildered her. What could it all mean? She recovered herself however, saying, as she held out her hand to him,

"I am very glad you are come at last, Mr. Wyndham: we began to think you had forgotten us."

"Forgotten!" he repeated involuntarily, with a grasp of the hand he held, that almost hurt her; but he dropped it suddenly. "No, Miss Eversley, I had not forgotten; but I have been nowhere lately. I only hope I have not kept Alliston away too selfishly."

"Oh, no!" she replied, with a somewhat forced smile: this was so different from the meeting she had anticipated. "We have seen him nearly every day as usual, I think."

Harry turned away abruptly: he got desperate when he looked at her; and murmuring something about the new fernery, he went towards Mabel and asked her to show it to him. Willy had been taken possession of by Mrs. Eversley, and as Harry and his companion turned into the shrubbery he saw Sir Evelyn, who had been talking to the Colonel, join Grace, and seat himself beside her under the acacia tree. Tea came out presently, but Harry did not once speak to Grace again,

he dared not. They shook hands at parting, and that was all,—all that passed between these two young hearts that were "true as steel" to each other, had they only known it!

Grace Eversley sat a long time over her hair that night: she mechanically brushed over and over again the long thick tresses, for her thoughts were all in confusion. Why had this change come? What had *she* done to cause it? Had he forgotten her, and seen some one else that had made him cease to care for her? Or was it possible that she had been all this time deceiving her own heart, and fancying more than she had any real grounds for? No: that could hardly be, when she recalled various incidents during his last visit to Alliston. Something had come between them since then, and she was powerless: but then, that look he had given her to-day! it was all very perplexing,—very strange. And if as these thoughts passed through her mind, a few bright drops glistened behind that veil of clustering hair, who shall blame her? But she brushed them hastily away: her womanly pride came to the rescue now. Never should he, or anyone else, suspect her secret. If he had ceased to care for her, at any rate, she would appear indifferent. And yet, even as she made her resolve, a little voice within told her that her heart was in his safe keeping, and would be so for ever, however far apart their paths might henceforth lie. However, she would meet him outwardly on his own ground: if *he* could forget, *she* could seem to do so too.

The next time they met was at lunch at Alliston, and again Harry Wyndham seemed engrossed with everyone else, and scarcely looked or spoke to Grace. She,

on her part, was apparently much interested in discussing all sorts of things with Sir Evelyn.

So things went on. Evelyn supposed he must have been mistaken in his former fancy that Harry had rather more than a common liking for Grace Eversley: it could have been only fancy; for nothing could be more cool or matter of fact, than their behaviour to each other now. The last week in April came, and Harry had to return to his duties.

"Good-bye, my dear old fellow," he said to Evelyn, as they shook hands at parting. "I can't thank you; but I'm afraid I've often seemed very ungrateful, and yet you know it wasn't that."

"No, no: I only wish I could have done you more good, and sent you off looking more like yourself. But you must come again this summer: that's a bargain, remember," he added, as the whistle sounded.

"All right: good-bye! Good-bye, my boy," he said to Willy: "and mind you don't forget me."

The train moved on: he watched Evelyn and Willy standing side by side on the platform, as long as he could see them; and then,—then he sat and mused over his visit to Alliston,—so very different from the last.

CHAPTER VIII.

“A will that swerveth not at frown or smile,
At threat or wile;
That shall be thine, all well with thee:
Oh, would that it were mine !”

ABOUT a week after Mr. Wyndham left, it happened that Sir Evelyn came across another friend of his, a Mr. Lindsay, of whom mention has been made as one of the Christmas guests at Alliston this year. He lived at Archester, a town seven or eight miles off. His father and Sir Hugh had been old friends, and the sons had often met. Sir Evelyn asked him now to come and stay from Saturday till Monday, as his business as a bank director kept him busy all the rest of the week. After this it became almost a settled thing that he would dine at Alliston on a Saturday evening, and leave early on Monday. He was seven or eight years older than Evelyn: a keen, clever, satirical man of the world, with handsome, rather sharply-cut features, and a clear, cold eye, that seemed to penetrate one through and through. He had the character of being something of a wit: certainly most of his friends—Sir Evelyn himself not excepted—were at times somewhat in awe of his demure jokes and sarcastic observations. Willy from the first seemed to have a sort of instinctive shrinking from him, he could hardly have told why: he was very unlike his dear Mr. Wyndham, but he knew

every one could not be as kind as he was to him. A chance remark of Laura's, that Mr. Lindsay happened to overhear, concerning his partiality for the former, did not tend to mend matters: as time went on they seemed to drift farther and farther apart. It was the covert sneer,—the passing smile of ridicule at sacred things that so often perplexed and troubled Willy: he could not understand it, and it grieved him to see that Evelyn did not seem to disapprove. Sometimes he could hardly help openly expressing his surprise and indignation; but he knew this was not for him to do: he only steadily avoided joining by look or smile in the amusement caused by any of his cleverest jokes and comparisons, when they touched on anything serious. Mr. Lindsay saw plainly that this was not because he did not understand them, but because he would not countenance what he thought so wrong: and strange as it may appear, it irritated him. Evelyn too observed it, and was himself half provoked sometimes. The child's silent protest might have made him feel somewhat uneasy, and this might have caused an almost imperceptible change: at any rate Willy felt that when Mr. Lindsay was there he was not quite so happy with Evelyn as usual; he seemed a little more inclined to be impatient with him, and to laugh at his scruples; and he had many a tear and many a heart-ache in secret, that his brother little suspected. Possibly Mr. Lindsay might have liked to have his friend more entirely to himself when he came,—perhaps he too felt the unconscious influence of that child's simple presence was an uncomfortable check upon him: however it was, he lost no opportunity of trying to impress upon Sir Evelyn the importance of not giving way to him, as he termed it; in other

words, of not recognising those principles which were in Willy's eyes so unspeakably important.

"I don't spoil him, though, I assure you," Evelyn would assert. "Wyndham used to tell me he thought I was sometimes too strict with him: and then he is such a good, tractable child, and so fond of me too, how could I treat him differently?" "Ah: that's all very well as long as you don't run counter to him; you'd find him anything but tractable, I can tell you, if you happened to oppose any of his strange fancies!"

Evelyn would not admit this for a moment; and yet these insinuations so often repeated were not, in time, without their effect. One Sunday afternoon, as he and his friend were sauntering about the grounds together, their conversation happened to turn on the art of reading aloud, as being rather a rare but most desirable accomplishment. "Did you ever happen to hear Willy read anything?" asked Evelyn: "it is most original. He hasn't quite lost his little Scotch accent yet, and he enters into what he reads in the most amusing way. He was reading to me yesterday a bit out of a very clever, racy book, just come down,—an account of a day's shooting with a Cockney amateur. The book itself is quite beyond him, of course; but this passage he seemed thoroughly to appreciate."

"No: I never heard him," laughed Mr. Lindsay; "and I don't suppose I shall now, for I have to leave very early on Monday, I am sorry to say!"

"Oh, he shall bring it in to-night, after dinner, if you like!"

"To-night? I hardly suppose you will get him to do that, Alliston. It is *Sunday*, you know," he added, with a slightly sneering accent on the word.

"Not much fear, I think, if *I* tell him to do it," replied Evelyn, smiling. "Look George," as they entered one of the houses, "those are fine grapes, arn't they?" and so the conversation turned.

That evening, when the ladies had retired, Willy was standing beside Evelyn as usual.—He, it may be remarked, had entirely forgotten the afternoon's conversation, but Mr. Lindsay, who had *not*, presently remarked, "By the way, didn't you say Willy should read us something this evening?"

"Oh yes: I had forgotten. Willy," he said, turning to him, "just go into the library and fetch that book you were reading to me yesterday. You know which I mean: it was the second volume, I think."

"Oh, Evelyn!" exclaimed Willy, involuntarily, but he did not offer to go.

"You know where it is, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes: I know! but"....

"Why don't you go at once, then?" the least touch of impatience mingling with his tone; for he knew that his friend was taking keen note of what was passing, to see if he *did* get his way with Willy as easily as he had anticipated.

"Oh, not to-night, Evelyn!" pleaded the child: "I would any other day, in a minute; but I can't read that to-night: please don't ask me!"

"And why not to-night?" said Evelyn, determined not to see the reason, though he knew it perfectly well. Willy saw there was no escape.

"Oh, because,—because," he faltered, "it is Sunday, and it is not right to read those sorts of books on Sunday!"

"And pray who is to be the judge of what is right

or wrong, you or I ? Let me have no nonsense of this sort, Willy. I wish you to do it, and that is quite enough for you : don't oblige me to tell you a second time."

"I cannot : I cannot !" persisted Willy, bursting into tears. "If you would only wait till to-morrow !"

"You will have to do it to-day, I assure you," said his brother, now getting angry. But he did not choose to prolong the contention before a third person, so he added, "You had better go to the study and think it over a little ; but remember, I am not going to be trifled with."

Willy's heart died within him. Evelyn had never spoken so to him before. He heard in his tone a determination to be obeyed, and dreading his anger more than anything in the world, it was indeed hard work now to keep brave. But he thought of the Master in heaven, whom he had promised to obey,—of the sweet promises Christ had made to His faithful soldiers,—and still he remained true. As the door closed upon him, Evelyn exclaimed, "I would have given twenty pounds not to have got into this contest with that child, for I can't draw back now !"

"I hope not, indeed. The fact is, my dear fellow, you've given in a great deal too much to him already. How dare he withstand you so !" and Mr. Lindsay's eye flashed as he spoke.

"But he has never approached to anything of the sort, so far ; never since I had him home, I assure you."

"Possibly not," was the uncompromising reply ; "but that has been only, as I've told you, because you never fairly opposed any of his absurd fancies. The idea of a child of his age setting up his opinion in that way : it's

preposterous! What a licking he'd have got at school for it, and serve him right too: why should he be treated differently to other boys?"

"I don't wish to treat him differently," said Evelyn, rather quickly; "but I've never seen any occasion for it before."

"Ah, that's just it: you've spoiled him a little, as I said: why half a word from you ought to be enough. You should see the way I manage that young nephew of mine; he has lived with us, you know, since my sister's death. A look is enough now, though I've had something to do to bring him to it!"

"I daresay," returned Evelyn, rather abstractedly; but just then as he caught the keen stern glance of Mr. Lindsay's eye, a sort of indefinable relief came over him that Willy at any rate was safe in his own hands.

"But I don't intend to waver," he said as they rose from the table: "these absurd scruples about such trifles I won't have him give way to. Don't say anything about it though, George: I had rather aunt Cairne should not know that Willy is in any trouble with me."

"Certainly not: only mind you keep firm, whatever you do."

A curious sort of misgiving mingled with Sir Evelyn's determination as he walked down the hall into the study; possibly had he been left to himself he would not have acted as he now did,—but Mr. Lindsay's influence with him was strong: he did not wish to lack firmness in his eyes, though he sincerely hoped that Willy would have come to his senses by this time. Great therefore was his regret and surprise to find him still as persistent as ever. Ah, he little knew the

strength he had been seeking in those few troubled minutes, that now enabled him to keep firm in this his first real struggle for his Master's sake! In his heart the words seemed whispering, "Thou, therefore, my son, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ!" and still he remained true to his allegiance.

To do Evelyn justice, he was very patient with him, and gave him every chance; but argument, persuasion, and even threats, alike failed, though he told him plainly what he might expect if he still held out,—just what, in fact, any lad at school would have got for far less than this, as his friend had said. Even then, though with many tears, Willy maintained his ground; but the alternative was rather formidable, especially coming from Evelyn. He thought he never had been in such trouble before; and when at last his brother, though very reluctantly, proceeded to put his threat into execution, his childish distress was overwhelming, bravely as he bore it. It cost Sir Evelyn, too, a great deal more than he would have cared to own, inflexible as he seemed outwardly; nothing but his own strict military ideas of discipline and obedience, combined with his friend's urging, could have kept him firm throughout. Afterwards, however, in spite of himself, he could not help giving way a little: he drew the sobbing child within his arm, letting him stand so, without attempting any words for several minutes. "Willy!" he said at last. The boy raised his head, but with an unmistakable look of fear and apprehension: he had been dreading his brother's first word, lest it should be a repetition of the command that had already cost him so much, and which still seemed to him as impossible as ever to obey. But

Evelyn had no intention of putting him to any further test that night,—was it just possible that in his heart of hearts he even yet doubted if he had really gained the victory?—at any rate, he would defer the issue of the contest for the present.

“I wish to explain to you,” he said, “that I am not going to insist upon anything more to-night. You have disobeyed me, and have felt the consequences, and there is an end of the matter for the present: besides, I don’t suppose you could read anything at all just now. But, remember, I expect that if I tell you to do the same thing next Sunday, you will do it at once, without any hesitation or delay: and if you will give me your promise to do this, I am quite ready to be friends with you again: but not without. Do you understand?” He understood but too well.

“Oh, yes: but oh, if it was anything else!” he sobbed. He dared not add more, but almost unconsciously his head drooped against Evelyn’s shoulder as he stood there, though he raised it again immediately as if he knew he had no right to his old privilege now. Evelyn noticed it, however. “Don’t try to make up your mind to-night,” he said: “you will have plenty of time before you come to me with your Latin in the morning, and I have no doubt before that time you will see that it is of no use trying to contend with me. I am sorry, Willy,” he continued, more kindly,—for the childish confiding action had touched him,—“very sorry that I have had to do this; but you know I gave you every chance, and I must not, cannot, allow you to grow up in habits of disobedience: it would be very false kindness if I did.”

“Ah, yes,” he murmured: “but if you could *only* tell”—

He stopped again, for he knew he could not then explain to Evelyn why he had disobeyed him; this was not the time: he could only wait, and hope that some day opportunity might be given. But oh, what a dark cloud seemed to hang over him now, at the thought of his brother's continued displeasure, and his opposition to those things which *he* held most dear. Evelyn did not speak: he sat silently thinking, and Willy seemed in no hurry to change his position, for his arm was still round him, though he sadly felt that he could not be all right with him again till he had given the promise that he dared not even think of.

"It must be your bed-time, I think, Willy," said Evelyn, at last: "and I ought to be going. Yes," he added, looking at his watch: "it is past the half-hour, so you must go."

He got up, and opened the door to let him pass.

"Good night," he said gravely: that was all. No kiss, no loving caress as usual: and Willy's heart was nearly broken. He tried in vain to speak: no words would come. When he reached his own room he threw himself on his knees beside his little bed in a fresh burst of tears. "Oh, what shall I do! how can I bear it?" he exclaimed, half aloud. "How will it ever end?" Gradually he was able to cast his burden on the loving Friend and Saviour who had been so long the refuge of all his childish sorrows; and then he prayed for Evelyn,—as he always did,—his own dear Evelyn he still called him; that he might soon—soon be brought to know the value of the precious things that he seemed now to oppose. He rose from his knees calmed and strengthened. "I will try to be a good soldier," he thought, "but it is harder work than I expected;" and then a

little verse that he had learned long ago came back to him:—

“Oh faint not, Christian, for thy sighs
Are heard before the throne;
The race must come before the prize,
The cross before the crown !”

“Ah, that crown !” he murmured, as he laid his head on the pillow; “how bright and beautiful it will be: no struggles there ! Well, I must try and bear my little cross patiently: perhaps it mayn’t be for very long.” And thinking thus he fell asleep. Meanwhile, as soon as Mr. Lindsay found himself alone with Evelyn, he inquired, with some interest, how the contest with Willy had ended.

“I am sorry to say,” he replied, “that in spite of all I could urge, he still held out. I was very much surprised, for I had not expected it.”

“I am not, in the least,” was the rejoinder. “I told you how it would be if you were so easy with him.”

“But I was most decided, I assure you, and acted on your advice to the letter; for I was determined to do my duty, at any rate.”

“Ha, did you though !” exclaimed his friend. “He is more plucky then than I gave him credit for: but of course you got the victory after that?”

“Well,” returned Evelyn, rather doubtfully,—for even now he half feared the charge of indecision,—“I could hardly press the matter further to-night. He has paid the penalty of his disobedience you see: but I told him that if I required the same thing next Sunday I should expect it done without any nonsense, and that I would not be friends again with him till he had promised.”

“If you told him,” repeated Mr. Lindsay, with the

slightest possible curl of the lip. "I only wish *I* had had to do with him, I should not have waited till next Sunday: then and there he should have yielded, cost what it might. But as the thing is done now, do keep firm Alliston: don't take him into favour again till he has promised."

"Oh, I don't intend to do so. Possibly, as you say, I may have spoiled him a little lately, but I mean to carry this point most certainly."

"That's right: I begin to have hopes of you," returned Mr. Lindsay, laughing. "I've no idea of children setting up their own opinion in this way, and making out everyone else to be wrong: but I shan't be here to see how you get on, for you know we leave for Switzerland early on Tuesday, and I must be back the first thing on Monday morning, to get all my work done." Then they exchanged good-night, and good-bye, for he would not hear of Evelyn being up to see him off.

It was a sad awaking for Willy next morning, when he thought of all that had passed, and all that was to come.

"What shall I do?" he said to himself. "What can I do? Nothing can ever make it right to do wrong: and yet to have Evelyn angry with me; how shall I bear that?" Very earnest was his prayer that he might be helped through. He knew that strength would come, but it was with a trembling heart that he went to him when he was dressed, with his usual Latin lesson. Evelyn did not hear him come in, he was speaking to one of the gardeners through one of the open windows of his dressing-room. When he turned and met the little face upraised to his, with such an unmistakable look of fear and anxiety upon it, his

resolution almost gave way. How he longed to take him up in his arms and make all right with him again: but he checked himself. He had been determining while dressing that *he* must not yield: the contest could not be allowed to end so.

"You are rather early this morning, Willy," he said. "I hardly expected you so soon."

"Am I?" replied the child, his eyes drooping, for he felt keenly the want of his usual loving welcome. "Shall I go away again?"

"No: I am just ready." And Evelyn sat down and held out his hand for the book. "But tell me first, Willy," he said, drawing him nearer as he spoke, "have you nothing to say to me this morning? Have you been making up your mind to give me the promise that I told you I must have before we could be friends again?"

How his face changed! He had been standing before his brother, but at these words he just sank down, and hiding his head on Evelyn's knees, burst into tears.

"Oh, what can I say? How can I promise now, more than I did yesterday? What shall I do?"

Evelyn was silent for a moment: he had hardly expected this; and yet he could not speak very sternly with the child kneeling there before him.

"Willy," he said at last, very gravely, "I am indeed surprised that you should dare to say this to me again. What are you thinking of: do you suppose it likely that *I* shall be the one to give way in this matter?"

"Indeed, I cannot help it," he sobbed. "Do, do let it go this once, Evelyn. Tell me anything else to do, but not this: oh, please not this!"

Strict as were Sir Evelyn's theories concerning obedience and discipline, and urgent as had been his friend's

advice, it was hard to resist that. But he did keep firm.

“But this, Willy,—this is the very thing of all others that you have got to do; the very act of obedience that I must insist upon. It may be a comparatively trifling one I grant; but that makes no difference. Whatever may be your notions of right and wrong, unquestionably your first duty is to obey.”

“Oh, I know,” he faltered; “and yet I cannot! I cannot!”

“Very well, then. You must not be surprised at the consequences. Till you make up your mind to yield to me, you must expect me to be displeased with you; and if, when Sunday comes, you get into further trouble, all I can say, is, you will bring it entirely on yourself.”

He saw that there was no hope. Nothing that he could say would avail, now that Evelyn had so made up his mind, and his heart died within him. But even as he knelt there, one little earnest cry for help went up to his Father in heaven, that he might be kept faithful. And then he tried hard to keep down his sobs as he rose to say his lesson.

“Wait a moment,” said Evelyn; and he moved to the window, apparently to speak again to the gardener, really because he could hardly trust himself at that moment. Willy’s tears went very near to his heart, but he came back directly, grave and determined as ever.

The lesson had been perfectly learned, but every now and then Willy almost came to a standstill. Evelyn saw how it was, and did not hurry him: even helping him with a word sometimes,—contrary to his usual

rule,—and explained the next lesson, as he always did; but then he gave him back the book in silence, and Willy, with an instinctive consciousness that he must not stay on that morning, crept quietly from the room. Evelyn noticed it: he knew how heavily his displeasure was lying on that little heart, but he would not allow himself to think; and yet he could not but perceive the struggle that was going on between his evident longing to please him and the strong counteracting power of some unseen influence, that he could hardly yet understand in so young a child. However, his determination not to yield seemed but to increase with the perception of the firm hold that these absurd notions, as he called them, had taken of his little brother. How he missed him though! The half-hour that followed was generally one of the pleasantest in the day, with the child's bright companionship and happy talk: they were so seldom interrupted then, and Willy delighted in having Evelyn "all to himself;" but now the room seemed very empty and still, and Evelyn, pushing aside his book, went down into the garden; but again he missed the little hand in his, and the little figure always at his side, in this their usual morning stroll: it did not seem to benefit him much. And Willy: ah, Evelyn could not guess the conflict that was going on in that childish, loving heart; perhaps he was hardly conscious what a place he himself held there, or what a bitter thing this estrangement was to him.

It was time at last to go down to breakfast: they were nearly all assembled, and he came in and took his usual place beside Evelyn, quietly, as usual. No one, of course, noticed any difference in either. But

what a different time it was to him! Evelyn was always so kind and gentle with him,—never forgetting him in the midst of all his duties as host to others; often giving him a look, or smile, or a touch of his hand, that said as much as either. Now, though he was so near, he took no notice of him, beyond seeing that he had all he wanted. But he soon perceived that Willy's breakfast was not much of an affair this morning: he only played with what he took. The plans for the day were discussed as usual, and as two friends of Laura's, who were staying at Alliston, were to leave this week, they talked of taking them to Ruthven Hold, a fine old ruin, about five miles off, where they would improvise early tea in one of the old courts, and return in time for dinner. Some were to drive, others ride; and Evelyn could not help noticing the momentary flush and eager look on Willy's face as he heard him arranging about the horses. He had often wished to see Ruthven: in fact, to ride there with Evelyn had been a day-dream of his for a long time; but the latter said nothing about him, nor did any of the others, as they took it as a matter of course that he would settle about Willy. His eyes were raised anxiously to his for a moment, but they drooped again, to hide the tears that would come, for he saw there was no Ruthven Hold for him to-day.

"I must be patient," he said to himself, choking them back as he took his way to the Rectory. "This must be a little bit of the cross that aunt Effie used to tell me about: I will try to bear it. But oh, I wish, I wish it was any one else that was angry with me!"

Sir Evelyn meantime had gone to order the horses; but he did not seem very animated about it: that look

of Willy's was before him still. How he longed to relent! but he knew that must not even be thought of.

The morning passed heavily enough for Willy: his lessons were all right, and Mr. Randolph and his companions were pleasant as usual; but there seemed a shadow over everything now. His very small appetite at dinner was remarked by one of them: however, that was never very great, so no notice was taken. At the usual time he came back again, and found them all gone. Very sad and lonely, he wandered out into the garden, and, taking his little old Bible, went to his favourite seat under the lime tree. He thought it seemed hard work to be a good soldier, and wondered if he should have a long time of such fighting, and then he found the chapter in which the whole armour of the Christian is described. How well he remembered reading it to his dear aunt Effie in the sunny parlour at the Manse one Sunday afternoon when all the others were away: he thought how she had explained to him what each part meant, and that Christ's soldiers must wear their armour always.

“Ah, if I could but hear her say it to me now!” he thought. “If I had only her to speak to for one moment!” and the tears just then blinded him. But as he went on, and read one after another, the sweet promises of help and guidance marked by her hand, his little heart grew almost light again: he knew that though she was gone, the Saviour she so often used to tell him of was near, tenderly watching and loving him, and that he was not really alone. The time passed on, and at last he heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and knew that the riding party was returning. Through the leaves he watched them as they came by.

Evelyn was on another of his beautiful horses to-day, called Zephyr: she was curvetting about, and arching her neck, as if but just started, and he was managing her with his usual careless grace, while talking to one of his companions. He never looked more completely at home than when on horseback: he and his steed seemed to understand each other so perfectly. Willy looked after him admiringly: at any other time he would have run to meet him, and most likely had a ride round to the stables; but now he kept out of the way, and presently stole into the house through one of the side-doors.

He little guessed how Evelyn missed him now: he was so used to have the child with him just in this interval before dressing time,—sometimes in the study, while he finished his letters, sometimes in the garden or grounds,—always happy if he might be near him, and amusing him by his innocent talk, and pretty care-sing childish ways that were part of Willy's very self. However, he tried not to think as he went off alone to the study; but the little empty chair so close beside his own made it rather hard work: nothing but his natural determination of will kept him unwavering still. Laura and her young friends had fancied him rather silent and abstracted that day, though, as usual, he had been all that could possibly have been required of him,—still there seemed a difference. He did not see Willy at all till he came into the dining-room after dinner, but he could not help observing, while apparently engrossed in conversation with his guest Lord Manvers, the half-doubtful, hesitating way in which he came to his accustomed place by his side. He gave him his grapes and biscuits just as usual, and no casual observer would have noticed

anything: when anyone spoke to Willy his gentle answers were always ready. But he cried himself to sleep that night, and the cloud seemed dark as ever when he woke next morning,—indeed as the dreaded Sunday came nearer and nearer he felt almost in despair.

The next day passed much in the same way,—he scarcely saw anything of Evelyn; and the times when he was necessarily with him only seemed to make him sadder, the change was so great. In the evening, after he had gone to bed, Evelyn was sauntering along in the lovely summer twilight, before he went into the drawing-room for tea, and as he passed the old lime tree, he saw a little folded paper lying close by the seat that Willy generally called his. He picked it up, and saw that it was his writing; but as it was not a letter he had no hesitation in reading it. It was evidently a copy of some lines, and was headed, “The children going: suffer them to come to Me.”

“They are going, only going,
Jesus called them long ago;
All the wintry time they're passing
Softly as the falling snow.
When the violets of the spring time
Meet the azure of the sky,
They are carried forth to slumber
Sweetly, where the violets lie.

“They are going, only going,
When with summer earth is dressed;
In their cold hands holding roses,
Folded to each silent breast.
When the autumn hangs red banners
Out among the harvest sheaves;
They are going, ever going,
Thick and fast as autumn leaves.

“They are going, ever going,
Out of pain and into bliss,—
Out of sad and sinful weakness,
Into perfect holiness.
They are going, ever going,
Leaving many a lonely spot;
But 'tis Jesus Who has called them :
Suffer, and forbid them not.”

There was something strangely beautiful in the idea. Evelyn lingered over it unconsciously. And yet a few lines in pencil at the bottom of the page seemed to touch him even more nearly. “I have copied these for you, Elsie dear, because I know you will like them, and you will not have seen them before. I love them. Sometimes now I almost wish I was going too. I can't tell you why: but you must pray for me very often, Elsie. I don't forget you”.... It ended abruptly here: evidently to be finished another time. A curious feeling gathered round Evelyn's heart as he read. Was it really so? Did the child lay his trouble so much to heart. Oh, how his better nature prompted him to cease the contest with him at once! But no: Evelyn's ideas of duty were in their way as uncompromising as Willy's. Cost him what it might, he must go through with this. The victory once gained, such a struggle could never come again. He placed the little paper on the seat, where he knew Willy would be sure to find it, and walked on.

The next evening was Wednesday. They were all in the drawing-room after dinner, when Laura remarked: “I can't think what has come to Willy lately, he seems so silent and spiritless, and he looked so dreadfully pale when he came in to-night after dinner. Did you notice it, Evelyn?” she added, as he just then came up to the table to put down his cup.

"He never has too much colour to boast of at the best of times," he answered, evasively, but with a keen feeling of anxiety at Laura's words.—"He hasn't complained at all, has he?"

"Oh no: and after all, perhaps, it is only the heat! Are we not going to have any music to-night, Evelyn?" But he just missed her words as he stepped out of the open window. She did not at all like missing her usual singing with him.

"He does not look much like it to-night," remarked Lady Cairne. "He has been as solemn as a judge all day; but perhaps if you begin something he will come."

Laura seated herself at the piano, and commenced one of her most brilliant performances. But Sir Evelyn heard without hearing,—he wandered on, many thoughts passing through his mind. He felt uneasy at Laura's chance remark. He had noticed more himself than he liked to own. Those verses of yesterday, too, what volumes they spoke! And he had observed that very day, when Willy had been obliged to come into the study with some message from Mr. Randolph, how hesitatingly he had approached him, and how timidly he had given it; so unlike his usually bright, confiding manner: and this of itself was no small trial to Evelyn. How would it all end? Surely before Sunday he would have come to his senses,—he would never risk farther punishment at his hands. No: all would be well, if only he himself kept firm! The next morning he had to leave the breakfast table before the others, as he was going to his friend Lord Manvers' for a cricket match, to dine and sleep there too. The dog-cart was at the door; but Evelyn had gone into the study for something he had forgotten. Willy had slipped out after him, and

now he stood half hidden in one of the wide doorways, for he dared not follow him. Generally he was chatting with him to the last minute on these occasions, and always ran out to look at the horses. Athos, too, was careering about, uttering short barks of joy at the prospect of a run with the carriage. But Willy did not stir. Evelyn came back at last through the hall: but though he passed so near, and even stood quite close to him for a minute as Wilson held open his cigar case and he took one out and lighted it, he did not speak or take any notice of him. How he envied Athos his master's caress, as he came bounding up. Wouldn't he even give him one look before he went? Evelyn knew well how wistfully the blue eyes were watching him; but he got into the carriage without a word; gathered up the reins, and in another minute was off.

Willy turned then and went away to his own room; there he broke down utterly. It seemed almost more than he could bear to have Evelyn leave him in that way, without one word or smile! The temptation came very strongly to give up, and say he would do as his brother wished: how nice and happy all would be again if he could only speak that one little word. But then came back to him the verses he had been reading under the trees, and once more he prayed earnestly that he might be kept "faithful" still. The rest of the day passed he hardly knew how: it seemed worse now that Evelyn was away, and he could not even see him; and he drooped sadly, though before the others he tried to be as usual. He seemed to eat less and less, however, every day, until Mr. Randolph became uneasy. He had tried several times to find out what was the matter with him, for that something was on his mind

was evident; but the child always said he was well, and seemed to shrink so from being questioned that Mr. Randolph forebore to press him. Possibly he had some slight suspicion of the truth, for he noticed how eagerly he drank in at family prayers any of his explanations that touched on enduring trial and bearing the cross for Christ's sake, and he fancied that perhaps his conscientious adherence to his principles might in some way have caused him to get into trouble with his brother; for much as Mr. Randolph valued Sir Evelyn Alliston as a most courteous neighbour and kind friend, he could not shut his eyes to the fact that he was by no means likely to feel with Willy in the things he held most dear; and earnestly he hoped and prayed that the gentle child who had so endeared himself to him by his winning sweetness and earnestness, might be enabled to keep firm if he were in any danger now, and might in the end influence his brother in the right way. The next day came. Willy had longed for, yet dreaded Evelyn's return. He knew it would not be till late, perhaps only just before dinner. He trembled as he thought that to-day was Friday: only one day more, and then Sunday! What should he do? He could never bring himself to act in a way that he believed would be so displeasing to his Father in heaven, whatever happened; and yet, oh, how terrible it seemed! He knew Evelyn too well to suppose that he would ever give way; and when Sunday really came: he dared not think of it. How he wished that he could speak to him, and tell him how unhappy he was; but his courage failed utterly. He knew he should never venture on that! At last the idea struck him that he would write a little note that he might

leave for him to see ; so he got a pencil and paper, and after many attempts accomplished the following :—

“ Please don't be angry with me, dear Evelyn, for writing to you ; but I am so unhappy, I don't know what to do ! I want to tell you how very sorry I am not to do as you wish ; but how can I ? it would seem like disobeying God to save myself. If you could but see inside my heart you would see how much I love you : and if you would set me anything ever so hard to do you would see how I would try and do it to please you. From your very unhappy little brother,

“ **WILLY.**”

This he folded and directed, and placed on his dressing-table, and then went away into the garden that he might be out of the way if he should come home earlier than he expected. But Sir Evelyn was late, only just in time to dress for dinner, for he had been somewhat detained. About two miles from Alliston he overtook Mr. Randolph, and asked him if he would like a lift. He got into the carriage, saying, as he did so,—

“ You are the very person of all others that I wanted to see, Sir Evelyn, but I fancied you would not be home till late.”

“ I am very glad we have met then : what did you want with me ?”

“ Why, the fact is, if I had not seen you I think I should have come up to the hall to-night. I wished so much to speak to you about Willy, for I am getting quite uneasy about him.”

Mr. Randolph did not see Sir Evelyn's start at these words, nor the sudden look of anxiety as he asked,—

"What about Willy: he is not ill, is he?" He had had his little brother much upon his mind since he went away, and was longing, more than he allowed to himself, to have him with him again.

"No: not ill exactly; though I never think him over strong. But just now he seems to have something on his mind that troubles him greatly; his appetite has sadly failed, and he doesn't seem to care to be with the others, but gets away by himself as much as he can. I have several times tried to find out what it is, but he evidently shrinks so from being questioned that I have not liked to urge him. Surely you must have noticed something of all this, Sir Evelyn, so constantly as he is with you?"

"Yes:" and he answered in a curiously quiet tone. "Yes: I have noticed it, and I can tell you all about it, Mr. Randolph. Willy is in trouble with me just now; but I shall really be glad of your advice in the matter, for I confess I am not quite easy myself at the way things are going."

He then went on to tell him of all that had happened on Sunday night, and how Willy had not yet given the required promise. "Now what do you think about it?" he continued. "You know me well enough to be sure that the last thing I wish is to use further severity with him; and yet, what can I do: ought I not to insist upon his yielding? Surely he is much too young to judge for himself in matters like this!"

Mr. Randolph was silent for a moment; then he said, gravely, almost sadly:

"You will not be offended with me, Sir Evelyn, if I am very candid with you and answer your question faithfully?"

“Certainly not, for I have asked you.”

“I will do it in no words of my own then, but in His, who said, ‘Take heed that ye offend not one of these little ones.’ I believe, nay, I am sure that you are hardly aware what you are doing in this matter, nor how serious your responsibility is.”

Sir Evelyn was greatly struck by his words and manner: he did not speak at first.

“But surely,” he exclaimed, “such a thing as this is not so important: it was but a very trifling act of obedience that I insisted on. What harm was there in his doing as I told him on Sunday night?”

“It was the principle it involved that touched Willy so nearly. And, as far as that goes, it cannot be looked upon as a trifle I think.”

“But these strict Puritanical notions are quite absurd for a child of his age. They must be shaken out of him; and if trying to laugh him out of them won’t do, what course had I left?”

“Ah, Willy clings too fondly to the teaching of his early days, to forget it so soon! He has evidently learned in Scotland a peculiar love and reverence for the Sabbath, and that made it so especially hard for him. I can only say that it is what I have always tried to impress upon my own children: they have been accustomed from their infancy to put away their weekly toys and books for Sunday, and it certainly never seems a wearisome day to them.”

“Well: I must own, as far as that goes, Willy always seems to delight in Sunday; and I believe takes real pleasure in the things that are a sort of restraint to other children. But then, he is so different you know in many ways.”

"Yes, he is no ordinary child, certainly; religion has taken a strong hold upon his little heart. I believe he would brave anything rather than be unfaithful to his principles; but next to this, his love for you is the strongest feeling in his nature. Perhaps you can hardly tell how strong, unless you could hear him talk of you so constantly as he does. I can imagine what a terrible struggle this must have been for him,—almost more than he could bear."

"I know it is so," said Evelyn thoughtfully, after a pause; "and yet, what am I to do? How can I let him deliberately disobey me now, after all that has passed too?"

"Ah, but take care!" replied Mr. Randolph earnestly. "Take care that your commands do not interfere with a higher authority. In everything else you have a right to his unquestioning obedience; and if I know Willy rightly, he will not fail in this towards you. But in this case, as you have not positively said that you *shall* require this of him on Sunday, but only that you *may*,—tell him that for the present you have resolved to let the matter stand over till you have further considered it. Take the child back to your love again, Sir Evelyn, for he is breaking his very heart for the want of it; and it is but a frail little blossom at the best of times. Coldness is worse to him than any amount of harshness would be to other children."

"Yes, poor dear child, I believe it is so:" and Sir Evelyn spoke in a curiously changed voice. "Well, I will certainly think over what you have said, Mr. Randolph. I see more plainly now how it was, and that it was not a case of mere obstinacy and self-will, as I had been persuaded to believe."

"No, indeed: that could hardly be with Willy. But I think if he might talk to you a little himself about these things, you might in time get to feel differently about them. Eh: don't you think that possible?" he asked, with a half smile.

Sir Evelyn shook his head. "There's no saying of course," he answered lightly; "but it will take rather a long time I fancy. However, thanks to you, I see better now how to act. But oh, I wish he was different,—in some ways at least!" and he gave quite a sigh as he spoke.

"Nay: don't wish that," was his companion's earnest rejoinder, "'for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' It is not often that one sees a child like Willy, whose little face is so earnestly and so steadily set Zionwards: you must deal gently with him, I think. And, sincerely do I hope and pray that the things he finds so precious may some day be the same to you. You must not mind my saying this," he added, as the carriage stopped at the Rectory gate; "you know how truly I have your best interests at heart."

"I know it," replied Sir Evelyn, warmly, as they shook hands: "you never need fear being misunderstood by me."

So they parted; and very soberly the young Baronet pursued his way home through the park. His thoughts were in considerable confusion: some of Mr. Randolph's words had touched him very nearly, and with a vague feeling of disquiet, which, however, he tried to put away instantly. Willy would be all right again as soon as the cause of his present trouble was removed, and he determined, as he went on, that he would take the advice given him; especially as a way had been suggested in which he could do so without compromising himself too decidedly.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Still, still as ever on my hand
 His gentle head he leans,
And seems almost to understand
 What my sad musing means.
His voice is soft, as evening breeze
 Beneath the summer sky,
And the love that fills his heart to me
 Remains undyingly.

WHEN Sir Evelyn reached the house he found that he had only just time to dress for dinner, so he could not see Willy at once, as he would have liked, especially as two of his cricket friends were dining at Alliston to-night, so he went straight to his room. There the first thing he saw was the little folded note, in Willy's round, childish hand: he opened it, and read it over more than once. “ Poor child,” he murmured, as he put it into a safe hiding place, “ he shall not be so unhappy long, if I can help it.”

He saw the struggle now plainly enough, and his heart yearned over him; but he was obliged to wait, for it was getting late, and he had to hurry to be in time.

There was plenty of lively talk at the dinner-table, and Evelyn exerted himself, and was, as usual, a most attentive and agreeable host; but no one knew how anxiously he was awaiting the appearance of a little

figure at the door. When the servants had left the room, and no Willy came, he grew uneasy, and inquired where he was.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," replied Lady Cairne, "he had a bad headache to-night, and asked if he might go to bed instead of coming down. I thought he was not looking very well this morning."

"I'll go and have a look at him after dinner," said Evelyn, quietly; and then he resumed the conversation that had been interrupted. When his friends were about to join the ladies in the drawing-room, he asked them to excuse him for a few minutes, while he went to see after his little brother. And certainly he did not take many steps up the stairs, though they were not few; but when he reached the passage where Willy's room was, he stepped softly, lest he might wake him. He opened the door; but to his great surprise he perceived that he was not in bed. A little white figure was kneeling by the side of it: his face buried in his hands. At the sound of a footstep he started and looked round; but when he saw who it was, his terror and agitation seemed to overpower him,—he felt quite sure, from Evelyn's coming up at this unusual hour, that his little letter must have displeased him still more, by showing that still he could not do as he wished. Now, he thought, his patience was exhausted, and the worst must be coming; and instead of getting up, he sank down just as he was at his feet.

"Willy," exclaimed Evelyn, "how is this? I thought you were in bed and asleep an hour since!"

"Oh, so I did come to bed a long time ago!" he sobbed: "my head ached so. I've been trying to go to sleep, but I couldn't. Oh, please don't be very angry

with me, Evelyn ! " he faltered, shuddering, as his brother stooped down and lifted him into his arms. He was trembling all over ; and as Evelyn felt what a slight little form was within his clasp, his heart for a moment misgave him.

" What has made your head ache so ? " he asked, " and why couldn't you go to sleep to-night ? Was it anything beside that ? "

To hear Evelyn speak kindly to him again seemed to act on the poor little heart like a spell. He could hardly believe it. He raised his head and looked up wonderfully into his face ; but seeing there something that reassured him, for that one moment he forgot his fears, and flinging both his arms round his neck, he exclaimed : " Oh, Evelyn, I have been so miserable—so unhappy these last few days, I almost thought I should die ! But what—what could I do ? "

Sir Evelyn was considerably touched, as may be supposed ; but for a minute he did not speak ; and this brought back all Willy's fears in full force. He, it must be remembered, knew nothing of the conversation with Mr. Randolph ; but only recalled the displeasure of his brother's last parting, and the terrors of what he believed was again hanging over him now, in consequence of what he had written. As Evelyn sat down, with him in his arms, he exclaimed, hurriedly :—

" Is it my wee letter ? Oh, Evelyn ! what are you going to do with me ? But indeed—indeed I did not mean to vex you ! " And in his alarm he clung to him almost convulsively,—and notwithstanding his present unlooked-for kindness, shook and trembled. Sir Evelyn saw it all now : he understood what he was fearing, and was very gentle with him.

"Hush, Willy," he said, low and tenderly: "you must not be so distressed, my dear child! I'm not going to do anything at all. Why should you think so?"

"Oh, I did!" he sobbed: "because—because I had said".... But he could get no farther.

"No, no: I quite understand what you meant, and I want to have a little talk with you about all this presently. But you must calm yourself now, my dear little fellow," he added soothingly, "and don't be so afraid of me."

Willy's only answer to this was a somewhat closer pressure. He was greatly reassured now, however; and as Evelyn gently soothed and caressed him, he by degrees grew quite still, except for the heaving sobs he could not entirely master.

"Willy!" said Evelyn, at last.

The child unclasped his arms; and as he raised his head, Evelyn saw what a sad, tearful little face it was. He placed him on his knee; and as he nestled close, the weary little head sank on its old resting place, but with a half-shrinking gesture still. Evelyn passed his hand reassuringly over the disordered curls; and then Willy looked up and met his eye fully, and an unmistakable expression of relief passed over his features.

"How good you are to me!" he murmured, gratefully. "I never expected this. But how is it, Evelyn: can it really be true?"

"I want you to tell me something first," he replied, smiling down at him. "What made you so particularly unhappy to-night, that you could not go to sleep, eh?"

"Oh, how could I be anything but unhappy," he exclaimed, with filling eyes, "all these days while you have been displeased with me, Evelyn! But I think

to-day it seemed worse, because you were away, and I could not even see you!"

"Did you want me back then, Willy?" he asked, in a low voice: "I should hardly have expected that!"

"Yes: indeed I did. Why you know I could not live without you now, Evelyn. But oh," he continued, sobbing, "when you went away yesterday without saying good-bye to me, I thought my heart would nearly break!"

Evelyn was silent a moment. "Why did you disobey me then, Willy? Why have you brought all this trouble on yourself, and on me too?" he added; "for you know all this has made me unhappy too!"

"Oh, but dear Evelyn!" exclaimed the child, sitting up in his eagerness again, and looking at him earnestly, "how could I help it? How could I do differently? I daren't do what is wrong, and so make God angry with me too!"

"But why should you think so much of this particular thing? What was there so wrong in what I told you to do?"

"Why don't you see, Evelyn, God has spoken to us very often about keeping His day holy; and says we must not do our own works and find our own pleasure, on His holy day. And surely to read such books as that can't be to please Him, do you think?"

"Well, but could it really have signified for once," he returned, determined to have it all out with him now; "especially when it was not to please yourself, but because I told you to do it? And only think of all that it would have saved you, Willy!"

"Ah yes! But then, don't you remember it says in another place, 'Whoever is ashamed of Me, of him will

I be ashamed.' And, oh, I should not like Jesus to be ashamed of me! I want Him to find me a good little soldier, when He comes for me."

"Comes for you! What do you mean, my boy?" asked Evelyn, almost uneasily; as with a pang he remembered some of Mr. Randolph's words that day.

"Why, sometimes," answered the child, looking wistfully out into the clear evening sky as he spoke, "sometimes I fancy it may not be so very long before Jesus comes for me. I mean," he added innocently, "I often think I shall never grow up to be a tall big man like you"—and he half smiled up at him as his little fingers moved softly over the strong hand that held him. "But I like to think of it, dear Evelyn," seeing the startled look of pain that came over his brother's face at these words: "it often makes me very happy."

"Oh, don't Willy: don't talk so, my dear child!" exclaimed Evelyn in undisguised alarm. "You are tired to-night, and not very well: you mustn't think of such things as these. Why only fancy," he went on, trying to speak cheerfully, "what should I do without you: do you think I could spare my little shadow?"

But he was hardly prepared for the effect of his own words. Willy turned suddenly, and clasping his arms again about him, he hid his face on his shoulder and sobbed aloud: "Oh, Evelyn! my own dear Evelyn! that is what I think of so much myself; that is the one thing that makes me almost wish never to go. How could I bear to leave you! I love you so very very dearly that sometimes I fancy I could hardly be happy even in heaven if you weren't there."

Evelyn was completely overcome himself, and for a minute could not speak: he could only clasp him closer

to his breast as he realized for the first time the full depth of that childish love and confidence that, notwithstanding all that had passed, could cling to him like this.

“My child,” he said then in a low changed voice, “you must not speak of leaving me: you must not, indeed, I cannot bear it. You are well, aren’t you?” he added, hurriedly raising him a little and looking at him with anxious eyes.

“Oh, yes: I am well,” and he smiled through his tears; “and so happy now that you aren’t angry with me any more; but this evening I *did* almost wish I could die.”

“I wish I had been home sooner; but you will be all right again now, I think, won’t you?”

“I’m sure I shall,” he answered, gratefully: “this was all I wanted. But will you really let me be with you again, Evelyn, as I used to be? you don’t know how different everything seems without you!”

“Certainly I will. And now I want to tell you that I have been thinking over this subject a good deal, and I have come to the determination to let it stand over, for the present, at all events. Next Sunday, I promise that I will not tell you to do what has troubled you so much to think of, so you may set your little heart at rest on that point. I am quite sure now that you did not willingly and wilfully disobey me, as I at first thought.”

“Oh, no: indeed I didn’t!” exclaimed Willy, eagerly. “How could I? I wouldn’t for all the world. I felt all the time as if I would have given anything I had if only I could have done as you wished. But how very kind it is of you Evelyn: how shall I ever thank you!”

Sir Evelyn stooped down and kissed him ; it was the first time he had done so since Sunday, and to Willy it seemed the seal of his forgiveness and love.

After a pause, he said, as if the thought had just struck him : " Evelyn, won't they be wanting you down stairs ? I'm afraid I have kept you a long time : haven't I ? "

" It doesn't signify," he returned, with a smile : " I am in no hurry." Perhaps he felt at that moment as if the companionship of that pure little spirit was sweeter than any he should get elsewhere to-night. They made almost a picture, those two, in the fading twilight ! Evelyn with his dark handsome head and somewhat haughty turn of features, broad shouldered, and strong, and in his arms the fair slight child, in his little white dress, with his soft eyes and golden hair : the contrast was a striking one.

" Willy," said Evelyn, after a pause, during which he had been silently thinking, " I want to ask you one question : supposing all had gone on as it was, do you think you should still have held out when Sunday came ? " He was curious to see what had been the working of the child's own mind on the subject, and whether he would really have risked getting into further trouble about it.

" Oh, I hardly dare think of it !" he replied, with a slight shudder. " I don't like to say it, Evelyn ; but I think I should. I know God would have helped me : but indeed it would have been very terrible to me. I have hardly dared to think of Sunday all the week ;" and again his face was hidden for a moment.

" Poor child !" said his brother, stroking his head : " I don't wonder at that ; but you need not think

about it any more now, you know. I only wanted to see if you felt as strongly as ever about it."

"Yes: more, I think, for I have found so many verses this week that seem to tell me the same thing."

"Ah, that's just it! I'm afraid you read too many things of this sort. They are not good for you; they are beyond such a child as you."

"Oh, but they are beautiful!" answered Willy, earnestly. "I love to read them: and if ever I am unhappy I always find something to comfort me. If you would only let me show you one or two places, sometime. Do you think you would, Evelyn?" he added, with an eager look.

Evelyn felt at that moment as if he could deny nothing that those pleading eyes asked. "Well, we must see about it: perhaps I will. But you mustn't talk or even think any more to-night: it is more than time you were asleep again, eh!"

This slight concession was more than Willy had dared to hope for. How thankful he felt. But he thought it might be in answer to his many earnest prayers for his dear brother, and his little heart was full of gratitude and hope. Evelyn did not know the joy his words had given, he only saw the smile, less of earth than heaven, that lighted up those childish features; but he could not tell the source from whence it came. Presently he raised himself up. "Evelyn!" he exclaimed, "haven't I been tiring you all this long time: I was forgetting that?"

"What do you suppose my arms are made of," returned Evelyn, laughing, "that such a wee thing as this should tire me!" and he held him up as one might hold a baby. "I only wish there was a little more of

you for me to feel. I really must have you begin to get rather fatter and stronger now."

"Oh, I shall do very well as I am, I think," said Willy, securely. "I should not like to get too big for you to nurse sometimes, Evelyn. I always feel so safe when you have got me: your arms seem so strong you know."

"It does not take quite all my strength to carry you, at any rate," said his brother, amused. "But, by the way, what time did you have your tea to-night, Willy, or your supper, whichever you call it; and how much did you eat?"

"I had it about seven, I think," he answered, rather doubtfully. "But I wasn't very hungry. I had some milk and grapes and biscuits."

"Indeed! What a magnificent repast. Was that all there was for you?"

"Oh, no: there was chicken, and some other things too. Mrs. Humphreys always sees I have everything I like; but to-night I could not eat: somehow it seemed to choke me. It doesn't signify though, Evelyn," he added, as he got up and rang the bell: "I don't want anything more now," and he looked up in a way that left no doubt as to what he meant. Evelyn smiled at him, but said nothing, and in another minute the footman came. Now, as may be supposed, George had perceived unmistakably that something had been wrong with his little charge for several days, and he could not help thinking that he must be in some trouble with his brother, when he saw him going about all alone, instead of being constantly with him as usual. He had often wished he could comfort him; but of course, that was impossible: the child had been so serupulously silent

as to the cause of his trouble. To-night he had vainly persuaded him to try and eat something, when he removed the almost untasted food, but Willy gently persisted in his refusal, so it was of no use. When he heard his bell at that unusual hour, he hurried up quickly, fearing he might be ill ; but stopped short on seeing his master there.

“George, will you bring something for Master Willy as soon as you can ? I am afraid he did not eat much supper to-night.”

“No, Sir Evelyn ; he scarcely touched anything. What would you like ?”

“Oh, bring some sandwiches and wine and water. I will see about their being eaten,” added Sir Evelyn, looking at Willy as George went out. He returned almost immediately with a face of infinite satisfaction at seeing the child so happy, and in his brother’s arms again. He knew all must be right now.

“Now then,” said Evelyn, as soon as they were alone, “try one of these to please me, at any rate, even if you are not hungry.”

Willy took one with a smile, certainly more to please Evelyn than himself, and then another, and afterwards some wine and water that he mixed for him. He saw with satisfaction, a little colour return to the pale cheeks by the time he had finished.

“That’s right,” he said, fondly ; “now I shall not mind leaving you so much.” He placed him comfortably in his pretty bed again, and once more stooped over him to say “Good-night.”

How closely the little arms clasped him for a moment, as he whispered, “Oh, how different I feel now, to when

I first came to bed to-night. How good you have been to me, Evelyn!"

Evelyn tenderly returned his caress. "Good-night, my dear child," he said. "Try and go to sleep now; and mind you don't think any more to-night."

He went: and soon Willy was sleeping peacefully; but not before he had lifted up his young heart in very earnest thanksgiving to the loving Father in heaven, who had so wonderfully and unexpectedly turned his brother's heart towards him. Sir. Evelyn went back to the drawing-room, and apologized for his long absence. "I could not leave him before," he said, in answer to the inquiries that were made; "but he is all right now."

He entered into conversation then with his two friends about the cricket match, and various other things; and after that there was music and singing. But somehow, all the evening long he seemed to feel the clinging clasp of those little arms, and to hear Willy's last low murmured words of love. Perhaps he hardly acknowledged even to himself how much lighter his own heart was, now that he had taken the child back to it again. That sweet companionship had become more necessary to his happiness than he was aware of. He could not at any rate, resist having one more look at him to-night. When he went up to bed himself, he came softly into Willy's room, shading the light with his hand; and then he stood and looked at the little sleeper. He was all quiet and peaceful now; only once, as he moved slightly, came a deep sobbing breath that told of what had been. The long eyelashes rested on the flushed cheek, so pure and delicate in its outline, and the blue veins showed like tracery on the fair white temples. There was a smile of almost unearthly beauty on the

parted lips that Evelyn hardly liked to notice there. Why was it? Just as he was turning away the child murmured something in his sleep. He bent over him again, and just caught the sound of his own name in accents of lingering fondness. "Poor child! poor dear child!" he said to himself, as he went back to his room: "I think I never knew till now how much he loved me."

Evelyn's dreams that night were of a little angel form, that seemed ever pointing upwards, and entreating him to follow: but the voice was always Willy's, and the earnest eyes the same that had followed him so lovingly from Willy's room that night.

What a different thing it seemed to go with his Latin to Evelyn next morning; and what a different greeting it was. Evelyn lifted him right up in his arms, that he might have a good look at him, after his fears of last night; but it was a beaming little face that was raised to his, albeit the colour that came and went so readily did not betoken very great strength.

"How is the headache this morning?" he asked: "quite gone?"

"Yes: quite!" answered Willy, gratefully. "And oh, Evelyn," he added, hiding his flushing cheek on his shoulder, "I am so happy! Only when I awoke I could hardly believe it was true!" As he finished his usual lesson, Evelyn remarked:—

"Very well indeed, Willy! You have said your Latin particularly well lately."

"I'm so glad you think so," was the somewhat timid reply. "I've tried; but I didn't know you noticed it."

"Yes: and perhaps I half guessed something of the reason, too!" And then they went out together into the garden, as they had not done for nearly a week past.

Which of the two appreciated the change most it would be hard to tell; but Willy came into breakfast looking very different this morning. No particular plan was proposed for the afternoon. Lady Cairne had some calls to make, that was all. But when Evelyn turned to Willy, and asked him if he would like to drive with him to Woodville, he assented so joyously, that Laura looking up, exclaimed:—

“Why, Willy, how bright you look this morning: quite yourself again. What has come to you?”

“I have been prescribing for him,” said Evelyn (purposely saving him a reply). “And I think my treatment has succeeded: eh, little man?” he added, with a smile, as he stroked the curly head beside him.

“Yes: but I don’t think any one else could have done it, could they, Evelyn?” And he looked up at him with happy eyes, as he left the table to go to the Rectory.

“What have you been doing with that child, Evelyn?” asked Laura: “he looks quite a different creature this morning. I do believe it was your being away that made him mope so and seem so miserable.”

“My coming home has had something to do with it, certainly,” he answered, lightly; “but more I can’t say. Physicians don’t usually explain their remedies to the world at large, you know.”

He left the room as he spoke, and Laura could make out nothing more. The moment Mr. Randolph saw Willy, he knew his advice had been taken. There was a light in his eye, and a look of relief about him, that told their own tale, but of course he made no remark to him. About ten minutes before dinner he went down to a cottage close by, to inquire after a sick

parishioner, and just met Sir Evelyn on horseback, on his way home.

"Good morning, Mr. Randolph," he said, reining in his impatient horse: "Have you discovered whether I took your advice or not?"

"I saw it in a moment," was the reply, "and congratulate you on the result."

"He will be all right again now, don't you think?" asked his brother, somewhat anxiously. "I am sure he had more colour this morning, and ate much better."

"I can understand that," said Mr. Randolph, smiling, as he stroked Fire-fly's glossy neck; "but he will need care for some time to come, or I am much mistaken. Not that there is any real cause for uneasiness I hope," seeing his look at these words. "You have done the very best thing for him now at all events. He is quite a different child this morning."

"I hope so," replied Sir Evelyn, somewhat sadly. "I shall always be grateful to you for speaking so plainly as you did yesterday." He rode on, and Mr. Randolph re-entered the house.

At three o'clock that afternoon the dog cart was at the door, and Willy ready, of course. Evelyn was detained by some business with the steward; but he came at last, and smiled at the happy little face as he passed.

"Ready at last!" he said. "I thought Marston would never let me go;" and then, lifting him in, he seated himself beside him, and took up the reins. Just before they started he stooped over to pull up the rug a little closer round him, and as the child raised his eyes to his, in all the fulness of restored trust and love, he almost involuntarily bent down and kissed him: this just filled

the measure of his joy. That was a very happy drive: he chatted merrily all the way, and thoroughly enjoyed it. When they returned he was with Evelyn, as usual, till dressing time. How pleasant it seemed to him to go to the study again, and stay with him while he wrote: the coming in after dinner, too,—what a different thing it was to-night? His little heart bounded when Evelyn put his arm round him, as he stood by his side, and talked and laughed with him as usual. Altogether, when he went to bed that night he felt as if he had a great deal to be thankful for. Sir Evelyn had been, perhaps without knowing it, unusually tender and gentle with his little brother that day,—he wished so to make him feel quite at his ease with him again; and there was something in the child's manner to himself, that was unspeakably winning, just touched, as it sometimes still was, with the slightest unconscious shade of remembrance and timidity. His greeting the next morning, which was Sunday, spoke the gratitude he felt: possibly, from Sir Evelyn's way of returning it, he understood the mute acknowledgment.

They all went to church in the morning, but no one thought of going again in the afternoon. Willy knew that Evelyn did not like his going without him, though now and then he had allowed it, when Mrs. Humphreys could take charge of him, and he saw the pleasure it gave him to go.

“The heat is really intolerable!” exclaimed Laura, as they left the luncheon table. “I think I shall go and sit under the trees: what do you say, Katie?” and she turned to Miss Lester, who was again staying at Alliston.

“It seems about the only thing to be done,” she

replied, "on such a day as this." And the two girls in their pretty cool dresses, sauntered out over the lawn and established themselves under the shade of a magnificent tree, with shawls and books, looking as if they found it tolerably endurable under the circumstances. Sir Evelyn was comfortably stretched out at full length in the shade, a little way off, with a cigar and his newspaper; Athos in attendance at his side. After a while he joined the others, and began talking to Laura about some alterations he was contemplating in the grounds. She gave her advice and suggestions with great complacency, for she liked to feel herself in any way necessary to the young owner of Alliston Park. Miss Lester was so engrossed with a new magazine, that she did not even hear the discussion. Just as they had settled the matter, and Evelyn had taken up his paper again, Willy came in sight. He looked round anxiously for a moment, but as soon as he saw Evelyn he ran to him, and kneeling down on the grass, whispered something very earnestly in his ear.

"You surely don't mean it!" was the laughing reply. "I can't believe you would like going to church better than staying in this nice shade with Athos and me."

"Ah, do let me, Evelyn: just this once. Mrs. Humphreys is going herself: and I didn't go last Sunday."

"I suppose it's only because you think it a sort of duty to go, eh?" said his brother, turning to get a better view of the wistful little face bending over him.

"Oh no, indeed!" he exclaimed, eagerly: "it's the greatest pleasure I have. Please say Yes," he added, as he fancied he saw a half-refusal in his brother's eye.

"Well, you may go then, if you like; but I can't understand it."

Willy darted off, and Evelyn turned to his paper again. But somehow he could not just then get interested in it. A sort of half-formed wish was in his heart,—in spite of his lightly-spoken words,—that he *could* understand the reality of those things that seemed to make up the very life of that child's happiness and joy. But the moment passed away. The seed sown by a childish hand, was in the end destined to bear precious fruit: but the time was not yet. The afternoon wore on: it was getting towards dinner time; and Evelyn, who had had something of a headache all day, wandered into the library. It was cool and shaded; and throwing himself down on the sofa, he tried to get a few minutes sleep. But sleep would not come at his bidding. Many thoughts passed uneasily through his mind, and he could not banish them. The incidents of the last week had stirred feelings within him that had long been strangers there. The earnest stand taken by his little brother,—the few solemn words spoken by Mr. Randolph, had impressed him more than he was aware of at the time. He felt curiously disquieted: a sense of something wanting was in his heart; but he could hardly have put it into words had he tried. Just then there was the sound of a little footstep on the gravel outside, and he saw Willy slowly passing the window, a book as usual in his hand. He called him, and the child came in with a look of considerable anxiety: it was such an unusual thing to see Evelyn there, that he thought something must be the matter.

"Oh, Evelyn, are you ill? what is it?" he asked, coming up to the sofa with soft eagerness.

"Nothing, my boy!" said Evelyn, with a smile: "it's only a tiresome headache, that won't go. I only wanted you to pull that blind further down for me."

He did it, and then came back to his side.

"Aunt Effie always had Eau-de-Cologne for her headaches," he said. "Shall I fetch you some, Evelyn?"

"Do! I think there's some on my dressing-table; if not, Wilson can give you plenty."

In two minutes he was back again; and very soothing to Evelyn was the touch of those childish fingers on his aching brow. Now and then Willy would venture to stroke back the thick, wavy hair from his forehead; smoothing it softly away. It was wonderfully pleasant. Evelyn lay with his eyes closed, his arm encircling his little minister.

"That's very nice," he murmured; and then he seemed to fall asleep.

Willy did not stir. And when in about a quarter-of-an-hour Evelyn looked up, it was to find him still beside him.

"My dear child," he exclaimed, rousing himself: "what have I been doing to let you stand here so long! I've been asleep, havn't I?"

"Yes! Does your head feel a little better now?" he asked, anxiously.

"A great deal: well, I may say! It was only the heat. I had been trying to get a few minutes sleep before you came, but couldn't. I knew that would cure me. I shall know now who to come to when I have a headache again," he added, with a smile, as he drew him down and kissed him fondly.

How pleased Willy was! He felt very fully rewarded then! Evelyn asked him presently what book he had

there: he could read to him a little if he liked. He knew well enough it was one of his own special sort, and that that was about the greatest pleasure he could give him. Willy eagerly drew out his treasure. It was the book his friend of the railway had given him; and he had read it over and over again, though it could hardly be called a child's book. Often he had wished he could show Evelyn some of the parts he liked best; but he had never dared venture on that. Now, an opportunity was given; and an earnest little thought of prayer went up, that he might be able to choose something that would be good for him to hear.

"This is the book that my friend, as you always call her, gave me,—the one we travelled with in Scotland. You remember her, Evelyn, don't you?"

"Perfectly!" returned his brother, with a smile. "Let me look at it again, Willy:" and he took the little book into his hand, and turned once more to the only words that were written there, but he did not say anything more.

"Shall I read some of this?" asked Willy, rather timidly.

"Yes: anything you like!"

He fetched a footstool, and sitting down by Evelyn's side, began rather falteringly at first, for he had never read anything of this sort to him before. The last few sentences were somewhat forcible. "True peace, what is it? Who does not long for it,—who is not seeking it? But it is only to be found under the shadow of the cross. There the soul alone can rest. The world's peace is all well, as long as the stream runs smooth and the sky is clear. When the storm clouds gather, where is it *then*? 'But *not* as the world giveth give I unto

you!' Seek it now. Leave not the making of thy peace with God to a dying hour: it will be hard to smooth thy pillow, if left unsought till then. Christ is ready: waiting, gracious. 'These things have I spoken, that in Me ye might have peace!'"

He shut the book. Evelyn did not speak. The child looked up at him earnestly; but the closed eyes told him nothing, only he saw that he was not asleep. Presently he heard him murmur, as if to himself: "Always the same old story. Just—just what she used to say." And Willy knew that he was thinking of his mother.

A minute after he raised himself up,—as the gong sounded,—and laid his hand gently on Willy's head.

"Thank you, my boy, for *all* you have done for me to-day. You may let me have that little book to look at again myself, if you like."

How eagerly he assented. "Did you like it, Evelyn?" he asked, with timid earnestness, as he got up and stood beside him.

"Its very good," he answered, half-smiling, and stroking back his hair. "This is one of your special favourites, I suppose?"

"Yes: I like it very much! I have read it a good many times!"

"And you understand it all, and feel what it means: eh?"

A strangely sweet, happy look came into his eyes, as he replied:—

"Yes, Evelyn: I hope so! I think I do a little! It is very beautiful to read about heaven," he added, thoughtfully, "and to think we shall never do wrong there any more. Sometimes I almost wish"....

"What, my child?" asked his brother, drawing him

closer,—“what does it make you wish?” He half-feared the answer, and yet he asked him.

“Why, sometimes when I have been doing wrong things, I think what it must be to be safe with God there, and to love and serve Him always, as the angels do.” His eyes brightened as he spoke. But Evelyn did not reply. In his heart the feeling came, “What if this child thinks so of himself,—what—what must my case be?”

He was silent for some time; and when at last he rose to go, there was a look on his face that said this had not been a lost day to him. No: it left traces behind it on his future life, in a way that Willy little thought.

They went up together, as usual: Willy taking care to put the little book safely on his table, where he would be most likely to see it. Evelyn often dispensed with Wilson's attendance on Sunday, so it happened that to-day they were alone. He was standing in his shirt-sleeves, washing his hands, when Willy suddenly exclaimed:—

“Evelyn: what do you think Laura said to me this afternoon? It was just before you called me in.”

“What?” he asked, without looking round.

“Why, she said I must not expect to be much longer with you, as I am now; for when you were married you would send me away to school, she was sure.”

“Well,” replied Evelyn, laughing, and turning towards him, towel in hand, “and what did you say to such a very startling proposition?”

“I said I didn't think you would be married yet: at least, you had never said so.”

“Capital, Willy!” exclaimed his brother, much amused. “So you made pretty sure, that if I had

thought of such a thing, you would have known : eh ? ”

“ I thought so,” he replied, soberly. “ But Laura only turned away and called me a little goose. I don’t know why.”

“ She didn’t tell you, then, who it was, that as my wife was to effect such changes ? ”

“ No : she didn’t say that. But I thought she seemed as if she knew all about it.”

There was a pause then. Perhaps Sir Evelyn was none the less occupied with his own thoughts, as he continued the business of his toilet.

“ But Evelyn ! ” burst forth Willy at last, as if he too had been going over something rather anxiously : “ do you think you should ? ”

“ Should what ? ” he asked, abstractedly, looking in one of the drawers for something he couldn’t find.

“ Do you think you should send me to school then ? ” There was a curious change in his voice ; and as Evelyn turned, he saw the tears in his eyes.

“ My dear child,” he said, taking the downcast face between his hands for nearer inspection : “ what has made you trouble your little head about this ? Do you really suppose I should ever want to get rid of you ? ”

“ No : I hope not. But I couldn’t help being a little afraid when Laura said that. What should I do away from you ! ”

“ You needn’t be a bit afraid. I promise you that if ever I do have a wife, she will love you dearly, and no more want to get rid of you than I do now. Won’t that satisfy you ? ”

Willy’s response was expressive enough, though with-

out words. And then Evelyn had to go down. That evening it was pretty to see him; there was something in his manner to Evelyn that betokened such absolute trust,—such a joyful assurance that nothing would separate them, that Laura, looking up, exclaimed impatiently:—

“Really, Willy, its a pity you can't be tied to Evelyn once for all; you seem afraid of letting him go for a moment.”

“Perhaps I *was*,” he answered, laughing; “but I'm not now. You won't send me away yet, will you, Evelyn ?” and he looked up at him affectionately.

“Not just yet,” said his brother, with an answering look and smile: “you and I couldn't do without each other yet I think.”

Laura would not notice this, and immediately changed the subject, with an uneasy consciousness however, that Willy *might* have amused himself with saying more to his brother than she would have cared for him to hear. Her words, however, as far as Willy was concerned, had missed their aim, for after that Sunday he and Evelyn were more inseparable than ever. The latter anxiously watched him, and contrived one day that Dr. Oakley should see him without exciting his suspicions. His report was quite favourable, though he said there was a natural delicacy about him that required care, but in his restored happiness he was soon bright and well as ever.

About this time the invitation to the Towers was pressingly renewed, and Evelyn agreed to go. Willy was delighted: he thought it so very nice to be going another real journey with him. The Towers was a beautiful old place close by the sea, where some of Evelyn's happiest boyish days had been spent. Lady Rythesdale received them most affectionately, and the

two girls nearly overwhelmed Willy with their caresses: rather different this, from Lady Cairne and Laura!

"Well, Evelyn," said his Uncle, entering the room just as Willy had disappeared with Lady Ida; "so you're come at last: I'm very very glad to see you, my boy. But where's Willy? I hope you brought him."

"He was here a moment ago," said Evelyn, as he shook hands: "but Ida has taken him off already. I was very glad to bring him, for he has not been over strong this winter, though he's all right again now."

"Yes: he is looking remarkably well," said Lady Rythesdale: "he does you credit, I must say. You must let him dine with us just to-night, Evelyn, as we are alone: to-morrow we shall have the house full, and Liscombe talks of being back directly."

Willy was very much relieved to find that his room was close to Evelyn's,—in fact, opened out of it. When he was ready he went down stairs with him. How kind they all were to him: Lord Rythesdale especially; he made him come and talk to him afterwards, and seemed to have taken as great a fancy to him as his wife had done.

"I'll come up for a minute," whispered Evelyn, as he wished him good-night, "before you are asleep."

Whereupon Willy gave him such an enthusiastic hug that the others were quite amused.

"No mistake as to that," laughed Lady Constance, as the door closed. "His devotion to you, Evelyn, makes me quite jealous: no one else has a chance."

He only smiled, but made no reply, and in a few minutes went up to fulfil his promise. He found Willy just in bed, looking as bright as possible.

"Isn't it nice here, Evelyn," he exclaimed: "and aren't they all kind to me?"

"I thought you would like it," he said, sitting down beside him for a moment; "and how you will admire the 'cliffs' to-morrow, and the sea. Ah, how I used to love it when I was a boy! Many a time I have been here with my Mother, Willy: this was her old home you know, and she loved it dearly."

"Was it?" said Willy, in an almost awe struck voice; "and does it make you unhappy to be here, Evelyn?"

"No, my boy: I love anything that reminds me of her." He paused then, and did not speak again for several minutes. Willy was softly stroking his hand, and when at last he looked up he was met by such a look of wistful childish sympathy that involuntarily his face relaxed into a smile.

The next morning, soon after breakfast, his cousins took Willy off with them; Evelyn had been taken possession of by the Earl, so he could not join them. The view, when the top of the cliff was reached, was indeed beautiful. Before them, far as eye could reach, was the sea, sparkling and dimpling now in the summer sun. A slight fresh breeze just curled the waves as they came dashing into the shore, and far out the "white horses" were plainly visible. Little fishing-boats were hovering about like white winged birds; and, altogether, it was so delicious up there, that Willy could hardly tear himself away. That day a good many guests arrived, all strangers to him, but he was very happy among them. If ever in his life he was in danger of being spoiled it was now, for he was the only child in the house, and made much of accordingly. Evelyn sometimes would represent this to his cousins; but they only laughed at him. It was impossible, they said, to spoil Willy,—and certainly his slightest wish was still

law to him: the loving allegiance true as ever. One evening, while Evelyn was dressing for dinner, and Willy in his room, amusing himself as usual, there came a tremendous knock at the door, and before he had time to answer, it was unceremoniously opened, and a fine tall young fellow walked in. "Hallo, Evelyn! how do you do, old fellow? Glad to find you here again, at last."

Willy knew instantly, that this must be Lord Liscombe, though he had never seen him before. From boyhood he and Evelyn had been fast friends, though the latter was his senior by several years. Evelyn seemed equally pleased to see him, and soon they were in earnest conversation. Presently the new comer turned, and his eye fell upon Willy, who was just then at the other end of the room, caressing a great deer hound that had followed his master in.

"So, that's your small brother, I suppose? I've heard of him. I say, Evelyn, what a jolly-looking little chap he is."

Evelyn laughed. "Come here, Willy," he called, "and be introduced to your new cousin."

"You didn't know you had quite such a bearish cousin, did you?" said Lord Liscombe, as Willy approached. "I see you're fond of dogs, eh?" he added, pulling his curls: "not afraid of a big one, are you?"

"I like big ones best," he replied, looking up half shyly at him.

"Ha! you're one of the right sort, I see. Come with me, and I'll show you another;" and he took him off to his room, where was a still rarer specimen of canine beauty. Henceforth it is not too much to say that he and Willy were great allies, and that he certainly was no exception to the number of those who were doing their best to spoil him.

During this week Willy had several rides on a spirited little pony they called "Jock." They were all astonished at his "pluck," for Jock was by no means easy to ride, and Evelyn got complimented on the excellent horseman he had made of him. Willy took no credit to himself. "It is all Evelyn," he would say. "I never was on a pony till I came home to him: but he never would let me be frightened."

Lord Liscombe was often much amused at his somewhat quaint remarks, and his extreme childish simplicity. One Sunday morning he was walking back with him from church: Evelyn happened to be on in front a little way. "What a lovely day it is!" he exclaimed. "I'll tell you what, Willy: we'll have a row in the boat this afternoon, and go down to the island. I dare say the girls will come, too, and we can take some fruit down there. What do you say?"

Willy hesitated a moment. "I think I had rather not go," he said, gently: "but it is very kind of you to ask me."

"Why not?" exclaimed his companion in surprise. "What could be pleasanter this sultry day? Do you think Evelyn would not trust you with me, if he doesn't care to go himself? I'll soon settle that," and he moved a step towards him; but Willy, catching his arm, looked up at him earnestly. "Oh, no! don't ask Evelyn. Don't say anything to him about it, please."

"Very well," returned his cousin, smiling; "but what an inexplicable child, you are, Willy. Why shouldn't he know? And why wouldn't you like to go?"

"Why, you see," and he spoke with some difficulty; but he knew he must not be ashamed of giving the

real reason: "to-day is Sunday, and I would rather not do that to-day."

"What would you rather do then?" asked Lord Liscombe, gravely amused, yet half touched at his manner.

"I should like to come to church again," answered Willy, simply, "if I could: but if not, I have some of my own books to read."

Just then, they reached the house. Willy escaped to his own room for fear of further discussion on the subject: he thought he should be safe there. Meanwhile, Sir Evelyn and his cousin had joined company, and were sauntering about together before going in to lunch.

"What a funny little chap Willy is!" remarked the latter, presently. "He astonished me considerably, just now. I wanted him to come with me, for what I thought he would have enjoyed this afternoon, but he refused because it was Sunday: very nicely you know, in his own gentle way, but still quite decidedly."

Evelyn smiled. "What was it you wanted him to do?"

"Nay: I can't tell you that. He begged me specially not to say anything to you about it, so I promised."

The slightest shadow passed over Sir Evelyn's face at these words. "I am not surprised at that," he said, quietly. "The only subject on which Willy is a little shy with me, is this one. I think it was his early bringing up in Scotland, that gave him such strict notions."

"Very likely; and yet, in spite of that, I think he is about the most taking little lad I ever saw. I shall quite miss him when you go."

When Evelyn went in, a few minutes after, he found Willy in his own room, kneeling at the window seat,—a very favourite place with him at the Towers, for thence he got a magnificent view of the sea. Evelyn came in

without his hearing : the first intimation of his presence was the soft touch of both hands on his head. He turned instantly : something in his brother's face showed that a little unusual feeling was at work. Had Lord Liscombe been telling him then : and what did he think of it ? Evelyn seated himself on the wide window seat, and drew him towards him. " Well, and what are you doing up here by yourself : did Liscombe frighten you away ? "

Willy looked up rather anxiously. " Oh, no ! I wasn't frightened. He was very kind ; only I couldn't quite do something he wanted."

" And what was that. I should like you to tell me, unless you had rather not."

" He wanted me to go in the boat with him, and some of the others to the island ; but I couldn't to-day," he added, his eyes drooping.

" I understand. But why did you ask him not to tell me, eh ? "

" I didn't know what you might say, Evelyn."

" Did you think I should be angry with you ? "

" I was a little afraid of it," and his voice grew unsteady.

" You needn't have been," returned his brother, drawing him closer. " Perhaps I ought not to be surprised though," he added, as if half to himself ; " but I thought, I hoped you understood now that I never wish to force you in anything really against your conscience. Didn't I once make that plain to you, my dear child ? "

But Willy's face was hidden, and as Evelyn stroked his hair, he thought he heard one little sob. That slight touch of reproach in his tone, and the strange joy his words had given, were just too much for him at that moment.

"Yes," continued Evelyn, "you must never be afraid again. But come and tell me whenever you have any scruples of this sort. I won't be hard upon you, I promise.

"How good you are to me," murmured Willy, gratefully: "you have made me so happy, Evelyn!" And then, as his brother lifted him on his knee, and they talked on, he found out what he would like best to do that afternoon, and arranged for him to go with Wilson, as he happened to be going.

Some hours later, as Willy knelt in the quiet little country church, with the sunshine streaming in upon him through the open door and windows, how earnestly his childish thanks ascended for the love that had ordered all for him, and had out of his one great trouble caused such happiness to spring.

Several, beside Lord Liscombe, knew of his refusal to join the boating party that day; but nothing did he lose by it. His bright happy face when he came in in the evening, showed, that whatever others had found, that little spirit had been drinking at a very pure fount of happiness that day, and he got no more teasing on the subject.

The rest of the week passed most pleasantly away: every day brought some new enjoyment. It was with very mingled feelings that Willy said good-bye to them all, even though he was going back with Evelyn to his dearly loved Alliston. He could not help inwardly contrasting the greeting bestowed on him by Lady Cairne, to that which had welcomed him to the Towers; but he soon forgot everything in the delight of seeing Mop again, and Snowdrop, and giving Mrs. Humphreys a most animated account of all he had been doing.

CHAPTER X.

“ Be brave, young soldier !
He whom thou servest slightest
Not e'en His weakest one :
No deed though small shall be forgot,
However feebly done.”

JAMES and Lewis Murray were at Alliston again now. Sir Evelyn had consented to their spending the last fortnight of their holidays there, to please Lady Cairne. This did not much add to Willy's enjoyment; but he tried to make the best of things, and to be as friendly with them as they would let him be. They certainly were not greatly improved since last time, though they never misconducted themselves before Sir Evelyn,—they were a little too much afraid of him for that; but he knew more about their usual treatment of Willy than they supposed, and only refrained from interfering because he thought it good for him to rough it a little and get used to other boys; he was so constantly with him, too, that he knew it could not hurt him much. One day at breakfast he happened to remark that he should have to be at Overstone that afternoon, and so could not ride with Willy as he had intended. The latter saw a look pass between the other two at this, but he thought no more about it. When Sir Evelyn was safely gone they set off somewhere together without asking Willy to accompany them, so he took Mop and

went into the Home Wood to look for a particular fern that Mabel Eversley wanted for her new fernery. He had just reached the place where he thought it grew, when to his great astonishment he suddenly came upon James and Lewis Murray,—the former carrying a gun. Now, though Sir Evelyn had occasionally allowed them to go out and look after rabbits with one of the keepers, they had been strictly forbidden, both by himself and Lady Cairne, ever to touch a gun when alone.

“Oh, James!” exclaimed Willy, “what are you doing? How could you take the gun when you know it is forbidden?”

“You hold your tongue,” returned James, angrily: “what business is it of your's? I thought you were more of a man than to be afraid of a gun.”

“Oh, it isn't that, you know; but think what Evelyn and aunt Cairne would say! Do take it back.”

“Indeed, I shall do nothing of the sort; and they will never know unless you tell them: it will be worse for you though if you do,” he added, menacingly.

“It isn't right! It isn't right!” said Willy, as he moved away: he saw further remonstrance was useless. At that moment a rabbit got up; James levelled the gun and fired. His aim missed, and Willy fell to the ground with a sharp cry of pain. Oh, the terror of the guilty pair! They rushed to him.

“Willy! Willy!” they almost screamed, trying to raise him: but he did not stir. His face was ashy pale: he had fainted; but for the moment they thought he was dead.

“Oh, James, you've killed him!” cried Lewis. “What shall we do? What shall we do?”

As he spoke the bushes were pushed aside, and Keith,

the head keeper, appeared. He had heard the report of a gun, and fancying something must be wrong, hurried to the spot.

“Gracious goodness!” he exclaimed. “Why, if it isn’t Master Willy. How in the world did it happen? What will the Master say?” And he tenderly raised the child in his arms, and perceived that blood was flowing from his side. James explained as well as he could. Keith was wrathfully indignant.

“You’ll catch it finely,” he said, “and serve you right too. Don’t stand blubbering there: run down to the village and see if the doctor is anywhere about, and ask him to come up directly. And you,” he added, turning to Lewis, “run to the house, and tell Mr. Wilson to have Master Willy’s room all ready for him. I’ll carry him straight up now.”

They set off instantly, and Keith proceeded with his yet unconscious burden. At last he opened his eyes and looked up, as if wondering where he was. Keith was a giant in size and strength, and carried him as easily as if he had been an infant, but the very movement caused him intense pain.

“Where are you hurt, Master Willy?” he inquired anxiously.

“Its my knee, I think,” said the child, faintly. “Will you take me home? Oh, it does hurt so!” he exclaimed, as his eyes closed again.

“We shall be there directly now,” said the Keeper, with an inward execration of the two boys whose wilful disobedience had brought about all this. Before they reached the house Wilson came out to meet them.

“What *will* Sir Evelyn say?” was his involuntary exclamation, as he and Keith exchanged glances over

the pale little face. Very tenderly they laid him on the sofa, and did all that could be done till the doctor arrived. Mrs. Humphreys made him swallow a tea-spoonful or two of wine: he looked so like fainting again. Willy opened his eyes. "Where's Evelyn?" he asked. "Won't he come to me?"

"He's not back yet," returned Mrs. Humphreys, soothingly; "but he won't be long now."

"Oh, if he would only come!" he murmured, closing his eyes again as a sudden spasm of pain contracted his brow. Just then the doctor came in,—Dr. Oakley's assistant, who happened fortunately to be in the village that afternoon. He proceeded at once to make an examination, and found that the shots had entered just below the knee: some of them had lodged there, and must of course be extracted without delay. You must make up your mind to bear some sharp pain, my little man," he said, kindly. "I shall not be able to help hurting you: but it will soon be over."

"I wouldn't mind a bit if Evelyn was here. I think I could bear anything then."

He was not far off. Soon after he had left Overstone he met one of his own grooms, riding as fast as he could in the direction of the town.

"Anything the matter, Foster?" he called out.

The man pulled up. "I'm going for Dr. Oakley, Sir Evelyn. Master Willy has been hurt."

"Hurt! how?" he exclaimed, in a tone Foster never forgot.

"Shot, sir. One of them young gentlemen had a gun, and did it by mistake."

Evelyn waited to hear no more; but giving the reins to his horses, and even urging them on, in a very short

time he reached Alliston. Seeing no one about, he went up straight to Willy's room; but he checked himself, and came in quietly, hardly knowing what to expect. How the pale face brightened the moment he entered. Willy stretched out his arms to him. "Oh, Evelyn! you've come at last: now I don't mind what they do."

"My dear child," said his brother, as he knelt down by the sofa, "what is it: are you much hurt? What is it?" he added, turning hurriedly to the doctor.

"Nothing very serious, I hope," replied Mr. Greaves; "but the extracting of the shot will give him some pain. I'm very glad you're come," he continued, in an under tone, as Sir Evelyn moved down to look at the little wounded limb himself: "he has been wanting you sadly."

A smothered exclamation burst from Evelyn's lips as he saw how severely he had been hurt. "What did those wretched boys deserve?" He went back then and tenderly supported his little brother while the doctor did his work. The first touch of the probe was very sharp, once or twice an involuntary cry of pain escaped him, as his small fingers closed fast over Evelyn's hand, and he hid his face on his shoulder. But it was over at last.

"Well done!" exclaimed Mr. Greaves, as he finished; "that was bravely borne. I never had a better little patient in my life."

Evelyn kissed him fondly, adding a low spoken word of approval that was more to Willy than anything else, and then he laid him down again. He went out with the doctor for a minute,—partly to hear his real opinion, and partly to recover himself a little,—for the shock had

been rather sudden to him. At last he was satisfied that no serious harm had been done, and just then Dr. Oakley arrived.

"Well," he said, as he came in, having heard Wilson's report: "what's all this about? I heard somebody had been shot and murdered, and I don't know what besides. Eh, Sir Evelyn," he added, cheerily; "what's the matter with you? you've got a face like a funeral. The young man isn't going to die yet, Greaves, is he?"

The two then entered into a medical discussion, and as Evelyn listened, he seemed to realize for the first time what the consequences might have been: it was almost too much for him. He was looking so pale, that when Dr. Oakley turned to him again, he exclaimed, "Come, Sir Evelyn, you must cheer up, and be very thankful it is no worse. Why Greaves says he'll be running about again in a week or so. I can't have you look so," he added, "or I shall have you on my hands next."

Evelyn smiled. "It's very foolish of me, but you see I didn't know at first what had happened. How *dare* they!" he exclaimed, half to himself, with an expression in his eye that would not have allayed the terror of the culprits could they have seen it; and then he went with Doctor Oakley to Willy. Now the latter was a special favourite with the old doctor: they generally had a little fun together.

"Well, Master Willy, so I hear you've been making a hero of yourself: what put that into your head, eh?"

"I didn't want to be a hero, I'm sure," he answered, laughing: "I don't feel much like one now."

The doctor took his hand in one of his, and laid the other on his forehead. "Not much wrong there, at

any rate. Now let me see what they've been doing to you." His report was quite favourable. "We shall have you running races in a week, young man, and beating us all. I'll tell you what," he added, with mock fierceness, "it's this brother of yours that wants looking after most: I had to take him in hand just now."

"Oh, Evelyn!" exclaimed Willy, with a look up at him as he stood there, that even Dr. Oakley thought was worth going through something for. He pulled him down towards him as he spoke, and an earnest embrace was exchanged between them, though rather a silent one,—perhaps each felt at that moment what the other was to him, as he never had before.

Lady Cairne and Laura had been out driving, and knew nothing till they came in about five o'clock. Dr. Oakley's carriage was at the door, which rather startled her ladyship. She found him and Mr. Greaves in the hall, just leaving. In reply to her inquiries she got very grave answers. But as soon as she discovered that no serious results were likely to follow, she attempted to excuse her nephews: "it was but a boyish freak, and they meant no harm." But Dr. Oakley, with whom she was not a favourite, cut her so short with his unhesitating condemnation of their reckless disobedience that she subsided. She found James and Lewis in a state of the greatest alarm, well knowing how terrible Sir Evelyn's anger would be. She rated them soundly, not for their fault as such, but for its consequences. "You'll never get asked to Alliston again, see if you do. How could you be so foolish, and with that child too, that everyone makes such an absurd fuss with. Don't show yourselves again to-night: the longer you can keep out of Evelyn's way the better."

up. "I won't then: but you don't know how sorry I am for them."

Evelyn felt some surprise at Willy's anxiety, for he knew what their general treatment of him was. Again he recognised the working of that same unseen influence, and was silent a moment; but then, he bent himself to amuse his little charge, and soon they were laughing and talking brightly as usual. When Mrs. Humphreys came in again to settle him for the night, he left him, and went straight to the smoking-room: his newspapers and cigar were more congenial than the drawing-room that night; but first he rang the bell, and desired George to tell the young gentlemen that he wished to see them in the library, before breakfast next morning. With great alacrity the latter proceeded to the school-room, and delivered his master's message: he knew how it would frighten them, but he had no pity. Their terror was extreme.

"Oh, George!" exclaimed Lewis, "is he very angry? What is he going to do?"

"I'm sure I can't tell, sir," replied George, solemnly. "I know a man was sent to prison last week for shooting rabbits in that very wood, so perhaps they'll do the same to you."

"Prison!" echoed James. "Oh, surely they won't send us there? Oh, what shall we do! You don't really think so?" he added, catching at George as he was about to leave the room: his face white with terror.

"I think it's very likely, Master James; only, perhaps you'll be took up for manslaughter, as you shot Master Willy."

James sank back with a cry of horror; and George, thinking perhaps that he had frightened them enough for

one night, took his departure. The next morning Sir Evelyn met them in the library with such cold, stern gravity, that they fairly quailed before him; but their looks of abject terror availed them nothing.

"I have sent for you," he said, "not to tell you what I think of your conduct,—no words could do that,—but simply to say that you leave this house to-morrow, and return to school. Dr. Lowther shall be fully informed of the reason, and what notice he will choose to take of your deceit and disobedience remains to be seen."

The boys were thunderstruck. This was more terrible to them than anything; it seemed worse than being sent to prison. The doctor was a severe inflexible man, and these were the very two things he always visited unsparingly.

"Oh, Sir Evelyn," they cried piteously; "pray, pray don't send us back to him: anything but that! What will he do? and all the boys will know. Oh, please, don't."

But it was all lost on him: he took no sort of notice of their tears and entreaties. "My decision is made," he said, as he left the room; "therefore your preparations must be made to-day." They were in despair: the sudden cutting short of their pleasant holidays, the dread of going back in disgrace to the terrible Head Master, seemed utterly to overpower them. Lady Cairne was greatly troubled, too, at the sentence pronounced. But Sir Evelyn remained perfectly unmoved: his look of quiet determination when she met him at breakfast convinced her that all remonstrance would be useless. Meanwhile, Willy had been inquiring from George when he brought up his breakfast, if he had seen James and Lewis that morning.

"Yes, sir: Master had got them both in the library when I came up. I hope," he added almost involuntarily, "they'll get what they deserve this time."

"You mustn't say that, George," said Willy, sadly; "I am so sorry for them. I wish"

But at that moment the door opened, and Sir Evelyn himself came in.

"Well, my boy, how are you this morning?" He had been in before, but Willy was asleep.

"Oh, I'm much better, Evelyn, thank you: my knee doesn't hurt me nearly so much now."

"That's right: I should think Dr. Oakley will let you get up to-morrow." He stayed with him for a little while, and then was obliged to go. How Willy longed to intercede once more for James and Lewis, but he dared not. When Sir Evelyn was safely out riding that afternoon, Lady Cairne, who had been watching her opportunity, made her way to Willy's room, and with very little ceremony came in. "Well, Willy," she said, "so you're not killed after all! Really there was such a rout and fuss, I thought something quite dreadful had happened, instead of a trifle like this."

"It was rather bad at first, aunt Cairne," he answered, gently: "but I'm much better now."

"Why, they said you screamed and fainted, and I don't know what beside. I would have tried to bear it more like a man at any rate."

"I hardly knew anything at first; and then, when they got the shot out, and it hurt me so, Evelyn said I was brave;" and the tears started to his eyes as he spoke.

"Oh, Evelyn; of course he would say so. I only wish

he would treat those poor boys a little more as he does you. I suppose you know what he has said to them?"

"No, I don't. I was afraid he would be angry: but he has not told me."

Her ladyship then went on to expatiate on Evelyn's uncalled for harshness and injustice, as she called it. But this Willy could not allow for a moment.

"Oh, but aunt Cairne, how could he help being displeased, when they had disobeyed you both in that way? He would have been just as angry with me if I had done it."

"That's all nonsense, Willy: he never punished you in his life, though I'll answer for it, you've deserved it often enough."

"Indeed, he has though," exclaimed Willy, quickly; willing that she should know thus much, rather than cast the slightest imputation on Evelyn's justice. At that moment the door of the dressing-room which had been ajar, was pushed open, and Wilson came in. He had involuntarily overheard most of the conversation, and that Lady Cairne should thus take advantage of Sir Evelyn's absence, made him very indignant. How changed her manner instantly became.

"I think our little patient is better, Wilson," she said, in her smoothest tones. "We shall have him down again soon, I hope."

"Yes, my lady: but he looks very tired now. I think he ought to be quiet, and try to go to sleep."

"Oh, I was just going. Good-bye, my dear Willy," she added, kissing him with great empressement before she left.

"I'm afraid you've been worried, Master Willy," he said then: "I wish I had come in sooner."

"I don't much mind now," replied the child, rather unsteadily; "only, Evelyn didn't really think me a coward, did he?"

"I'm sure he didn't, sir. He said to me that very night while he was dressing, he never saw a man bear pain better."

"I'm very glad: thank you, Wilson;" and he closed his eyes wearily. He seemed to sleep, but every now and then Wilson perceived a tear steal down from under the long fringing lashes: the pain caused by Lady Carine's harsh unfeeling words would not quite pass away; but he struggled with himself, and thought of the loving Saviour, whose patient, meek example he so longed to follow, and soon he was quite himself again. Mrs. Humphreys came in presently with some jelly and biscuits, and a few minutes after George brought in a small sealed note addressed to Willy. He took it rather wonderingly, opened and read it several times, and laid it down beside him without a word, but Mrs. Humphreys thought him particularly silent after that. It was from James Murray: a most mournful appeal, and ran as follows:—

"My dear Willy, I am so very sorry I shot you, and hurt you so much, if you think you can ever forgive me, do help us now. Do, do ask Sir Evelyn not to send us back to school as he said: the Doctor is awful when he is angry; and all the boys will know. Oh, if you only knew Dr. Lowther, you would understand. I don't know what else to say, but I do know that we have not deserved that you should do this; for we have often been very unkind to you."

"JAMES MURRAY."

Willy was greatly distressed : this was indeed terrible. He would give anything in the world to help them ; but dare he speak to Evelyn, again : he almost thought not. After a time Sir Evelyn returned from his ride ; but it was nearly half-an-hour before he came up to Willy, he went first into the study and wrote to Dr. Lowther. Just as he had finished, Wilson came to him. He thought it was only right that his master should know how Lady Cairne had taken advantage of his absence.

“ I'll take care that this sort of thing does not happen again,” said Sir Evelyn, quickly. “ Poor little lad, a coward is the last name he deserves.”

When he went up he found Willy sitting up, looking rather flushed and anxious ; evidently something had been troubling him, but his face brightened the moment he saw his brother.

“ I hear you've had a visitor,” he said, as he seated himself beside him ; “ but I'm afraid it has done you more harm than good, eh ? This looks rather like it,” he added, drawing his fingers fondly down the flushed cheek.

“ Oh, no, Evelyn : I don't mind a bit now. Wilson said you did not think me a coward, and that was all I cared for.”

“ Indeed, I didn't. I could not wish to have borne it better myself : and that probing was very sharp work. But I've always thought you brave about bearing pain, my boy.”

“ Have you ? I am very glad. But oh, Evelyn ! ” and he turned suddenly, and hid his face on his breast, “ I would bear it all again willingly, and more than that, if only this once you would do as I ask. Don't be angry

with me for speaking once more ; but it does make me so very unhappy."

Evelyn was silent a moment : this was not Lady Cairne's work, it was that other matter that he was laying to heart so much. What should he do ? How could he grant his request ? and how strange that he should be so anxious about it ! The silence made Willy look up : he was afraid he had gone too far ; but still he ventured.

"Will you look at this, Evelyn ?" he took up the little note that lay beside him, and put it into his hand. He took it, and read it : it was hardly in nature not to be somewhat touched by the pitiful appeal ; but that alone would never have moved him. It was the half-shrinking, tearful child in his arms, with his timid entreaties and winning earnestness, that shook the strong man in his purpose, as nothing and no one else could have done.

"Willy," he said, gently, "this is not good for you ; you must not make yourself so unhappy. I am not angry with you, my dear child : don't be afraid of that ; but you have asked me a very difficult thing. My judgment says I ought not to yield ; and yet, how can I refuse you ?"

He looked up eagerly : but at first no words came. "Oh, Evelyn !" he whispered ; then "Say that again. Oh, do say you won't, this once !"

"If I do, it is for your sake : only for your's, remember !" and then he got up, saying, "Wait for a minute ;" and went downstairs.

Willy wondered a little what for, but in less than that time he was back again, with a sealed letter in his hand.

"There," he said, as he gave it to him, "you may take this, and do what you like with it. Will that satisfy you, eh?"

It was the letter to Dr. Lowther. How his eyes sparkled. "Oh, this is too kind of you, Evelyn! and you had really written it. What will they say?"

"It is entirely through you though," replied his brother. "I shall take good care to let them know that; and perhaps it will make them a little ashamed of the way they have always treated you."

"How did you know, Evelyn?" he asked, anxiously. "I never would tell you, for fear you should be vexed."

"I hear and see a great many things. But again I say you're a strange child, Willy: true to your colours, I must admit. But now I must go, my boy, for I have several letters to write. Do you want anyone?"

"May James, come? I do so long to tell him."

Evelyn smiled. "Well, I suppose I must say Yes: George shall send him here."

A few minutes passed, and there came a very low knock at the door, and then James entered; not much like his usual self, certainly, there was such an utter absence of his jaunty consequential air. He seemed startled at Willy's looks. "Are you very bad still?" he exclaimed, involuntarily. "Oh, Willy, I am sorry."

"Oh, no," he replied, joyfully: "I am much better. But look here, James: what do you think I wanted to tell you? Look what Evelyn has given me to do as I like with!" There was the letter they had dreaded so much, addressed to Dr. Lowther in Sir Evelyn's fine clear hand, with his beautiful crest on the seal. James took it almost fearfully. Was it possible that it was never to pass into the hands of the awe-inspiring head

Master! But he dropped it again, and flinging his arms round Willy, he exclaimed, "Oh, Willy, I can't believe it! and I know it's all you. How very jolly of you; and how good of Sir Evelyn." Willy seemed equally delighted.

"Yes, indeed it's true: and I *am* so glad. It was good of Evelyn after he had written, wasn't it?" And then they looked at it again, and Willy pointed to the tiny fire that was burning in the grate. James understood, and the next moment it was crackling and blazing there, and the two watched it till it was quite consumed.

James came then and knelt down beside the bed. "Willy, how is it that you have done this? I can't understand. I should have thought you would have been glad to get us sent away."

"No. I did long to help you: but I would do anything if only you would let me be friends with you. Won't you let me, now?" he added, sweetly.

"Oh, don't say that: we don't deserve it. I can't think how you can want it, Willy; but then, you *are* so good: you never seem to do wrong things, as we do."

"You mustn't say that, James: I'm often, often doing wrong. I wish, oh, how I wish, that I tried to please God a great deal more."

"Well, I'm sure if I were as good as you are I should be quite happy: but it seems no use trying. I do try sometimes, Willy, though perhaps you don't think it; but I never seem to do any better, and then I think how displeased God must be, and He never can love or forgive me."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Willy, earnestly, surprised to hear him talk in this way: "God forgives us so willingly. But not for anything we can do,—only for the

sake of Jesus, who died for us; and if you ask Him He will forgive you, and give you His Spirit to help you to be different. You will, won't you?" he added, in tones tremulous in their earnestness.

"I will: I will!" he replied, in a choking voice: "but it is hard work. I've no one to help me now, since Mother went: she used to talk to me like this," and he hid his face on the bed, with a low sob that went straight to Willy's heart.

"Poor James!" he murmured, as his arm stole fondly round his neck: "I never knew you felt so. But, indeed God will help you if you ask Him, and I will pray for you very often."

At that moment there was a step in the passage. James started up: "It's Sir Evelyn!" he exclaimed. "What shall I do?"

"It's all right now you know," said Willy: "there's nothing to be afraid of."

"But I am afraid," he answered, hurriedly, as the door opened, and Sir Evelyn entered. He shrank behind the bed, and dared not look up; he could not yet shake off the remembrance of that terrible interview in the morning. Perhaps it was partly in answer to the silent appeal from Willy's eyes that Sir Evelyn turned kindly to the trembling boy.

"Willy has told you what he has done for you, James, hasn't he?"

"Yes," he faltered, as he came a step forward. "And, —and I want to thank you, sir; but I don't know how."

"You must thank Willy," replied Sir Evelyn, touched a little himself at last: "it is entirely for his sake that I have done it. But let this be a lesson to you,

my boy," he added, laying his hand on his shoulder : "a lesson for your whole life. Think what the consequences of your wilful disobedience might have been : if Willy had been killed should you ever have forgiven yourself ? "

James sobbed as he stood there : his talk with Willy, Sir Evelyn's unexpected kindness, and the terrible thought of what might have been, completely unmanned him. It was indeed a lesson that he never forgot. When he went away Evelyn sat down beside Willy and put his arm round him, for he saw how agitated he was : that strong support was just what he needed, though not a word was said by either at first.

"I've got a bit of news for you, Willy," he said then. "Your friend Mr. Wyndham is coming here again : he does not say which day, but this week at all events."

"Oh, how nice ! I am glad ; for I do like him very much, and I shall be down again by that time."

"Yes : you are to come down to-morrow, Dr. Oakley says. I think the study will be best for you ; for you know no one can disturb you there, without *my* leave : the library and morning-room are different."

"I love your study," said Willy, musingly. "You have everything so beautiful there, Evelyn ; and I am more sure of having you, and that is best of all : I'm always happy then, whether you talk to me or not."

"My little shadow, I may well call you," returned his brother, fondly : "I've felt quite lost without you there the last day or two."

"Have you really ? Oh," he exclaimed with sudden impulse, "it's just because I love you so dearly that I do long so very much to know that you are really happy

too, dear Evelyn: as happy as I am!" He added earnestly,—"It does make everything seem so different. Perhaps I ought not to speak so to you, but I think about it very often."

"As happy as you are, my child! You don't think I am that quite then,—and yet I suppose I have what most people would think enough to make them happy."

"Yes, I know," he answered earnestly; "but then to feel sure about that other home,—to know that we are ready, and that God has forgiven us and loves us, must make us much happier: don't you think so?" and he looked up at him with his soft, loving eyes, till Evelyn was fairly vanquished.

"You would make me think so if any one could," he answered, kissing him.

Willy laid his head down on its accustomed resting-place and added no more, for his heart was very full. Evelyn, too, was silent; but as he held him, still the simple words came home to him. Happiness! Yes: it was what all were striving for; and yet here was he, with his princely home and broad acres, and all the surroundings of youth and wealth and position, lacking, in the eyes of this little child, the one thing that could ensure it. Strive against the feeling as he might, there it was,—the unconscious yielding to the mighty truth, that nothing, save the Infinity of Him who made it, can satisfy the cravings of an immortal soul! And while these thoughts were passing through his mind, what yearning petitions were ascending for him from that childish heart: how intense grew his longings! So some time passed. Evelyn did not move, for he fancied Willy was asleep; but when at last he stooped down to see, there was no look of sleep in the clear eyes

that were raised to his. Just then Mrs. Humphreys entered with a summons for Evelyn from his friend Lord Manvers, who was in the library and in a hurry to see him. He had come to ask him to have the annual cricket match between his eleven and the Alliston some day during the next week, as he was going abroad sooner than he expected. It was a very short notice, but Evelyn agreed, though it would involve hard practice for a day or two.

The next morning he carried Willy downstairs himself, and placed him comfortably on the sofa in the study.

"I'm sorry I shall have to leave you so much, my boy," he said; "but you see we have not a moment to lose before Thursday."

"Oh, no: don't think of me! I do so hope our eleven will beat!"

Evelyn laughed at his eagerness. "I hope so, too," he replied; "but I must be off and look after them."

For some time Willy amused himself with his books: then came a gentle knock at the door, and Grace Eversley came in.

"Oh, Gracie, how glad I am to see you! Do come and stay with me: Evelyn is out, and I am all alone."

"My poor Willy! only think of your being obliged to be here this lovely day."

Willy smiled, and assured her he was nearly well again; and then she took off her hat and sat down beside him. It quite did him good, for it was some days since he had seen her, and her quiet talk amused him. All at once the door opened, and without any ceremony Harry Wyndham walked in. He had been expected, as has been said, but the day was left uncertain. He had heard from Wilson where Willy was, and of

course expected to find him alone. His start of surprise now was rather amusing. Grace rose hastily: she had been kneeling beside Willy, showing him some photographs. Her colour deepened almost painfully; but she shook hands with him, and then, as he turned to Willy, quietly put on her hat.

"Oh, Gracie, are you going?" asked Willy, mournfully. "Why are you in such a hurry? I thought you were going to stay a long time."

"I must go, dear," she replied quickly. "I think mamma may be wanting me."

"Don't let me send you away, Miss Eversley," said Harry stiffly. "I can come back to Willy at any time, and need not interrupt you." But Grace persisted. He accompanied her to the door, and there they shook hands formally and parted. He had been schooling himself severely before he came this time, and thought he had got the victory; but the moment he saw that face again he felt how unchanged all was, how complete yet was her empire over him. That icy manner was his only safeguard; and perhaps, on the whole, it was best for her: it helped her better to maintain an outward coldness herself, beneath which what depths of wounded love and pride were welling in her heart!

"I'm so pleased you're come back," said Willy, as he returned to him. "Evelyn did not know which day to expect you."

"I didn't know myself till yesterday. By the way, where is his Highness? I haven't seen him yet."

Willy explained, and after a little while insisted on his going to the cricket ground, as he was to play in the match on Thursday. Mrs. Humphreys came to look after him in the course of the afternoon, and Wilson;

and about seven o'clock he saw his brother and Mr. Wyndham slowly coming up together towards the house.

"Well, Evelyn," he exclaimed, as they came in through the open window: "have they done well? Do you think we shall win?"

"Yes: I think I am in pretty good hopes. And what have you been doing with your little self all this time?"

"I've had a visitor. Gracie came to see me; but she went away in a great hurry: she said before, though, that she should come and see the practice to-morrow."

"She dearly loves cricket," laughed Evelyn. "I often tell her it is a pity she can do no more than look on. She and Mabel do sport our light blue, though, enthusiastically on match days."

Harry turned away. His courage was failing him: even this simple talk was too much. Evelyn, too, went up to dress, carrying Willy off with him. On the stairs they met James Murray. His look was so earnest, so wistful, though he seemed afraid to speak, that Evelyn stopped a moment to give him a look at Willy, adding a kind word himself that made him happy for the rest of the evening. Next day Willy was out for a long time under the trees, watching the cricket practice, but no Gracie appeared, anxiously as he expected her. He was so much better on Sunday that he was able to walk to church, as there was a short private path through the grounds. When they came back, and the others went in, Evelyn seated himself on a shaded seat in the veranda, and called Willy to him. He felt as if he had seen hardly anything of him the last day or two. They chatted on about various things, till at last Willy

said, "Evelyn, I want to ask you something very much: will you promise not to mind?"

"Nay: how can I do that?" he answered, laughing. "It might be something I minded very particularly."

"Well: you won't mind if I just ask you?"

"I think I may venture so far, so go on."

"I do want you so to let me see poor Johnny once more. I've been thinking so much of him, Evelyn, lately; and I thought, supposing he should be ill like me, he has no mother now to take care of him, you know, and it seems so dreadful!"

"But neither have you, my child, if it comes to that," replied Evelyn, fondly: "eh?"

"But I have *you*," he said, looking up at him with such an unconscious, grave disposing of the matter in that one word, that Evelyn involuntarily drew him closer. Had he then fulfilled his father's trust? That sweet childish reply seemed to say so. It was very precious to him: a full reward even then. Ah, he dared not think what his own life would be now if that fair little blossom should ever fade from his side."

"But Willy," he went on, returning to the subject: "what possible pleasure would you find in such a miserable, hopeless lad as that, supposing I did let you see him?"

"Oh, it's just because he is so miserable, that I want to try and help him to be more happy."

"And how do you propose to set about that?" he asked, rather curiously.

"Why, I want him to remember that he need not always be so, that some day he may be a bright happy angel in heaven with God, and that He loves him though no one seems to care for him here. I think he

would be happier if he knew better about these things," he added, thoughtfully.

Evelyn was silent. Again he was forcibly struck with the child's vivid realization of unseen things, and his tender anxiety for this neglected little one. "It is curious, Willy," he said, at last, "that you should have asked this to-day, for only this very week that man, Cave, was brought before me again for poaching, and I had to commit him: he's certain to be transported this time, and then what is to become of his boy, I don't know; but I promise that you shall see him again at any rate."

"Thank, you, dear Evelyn," exclaimed Willy, gratefully: "that is very kind of you." And soon after they went in.

Thursday came at last, and the cricket match was a great success. A tent was pitched near the ground for refreshments, plenty of seats arranged under the great oak tree, and many visitors arrived, among whom were the Eversleys. Never had Grace's colour been brighter, or her dark eyes more lustrous than they were to-day, —at least, so thought one who watched her. Little he guessed the cause: the proud determination that was nerving her to appear as usual in his eyes at any rate. She and Mabel wore the Alliston colours, blue and white; Lord Manvers uniform being red and white. The game soon began in good earnest: it was well fought; but in the end Alliston was victorious. Willy had watched it with the greatest interest; and when he saw the two captains coming up together towards the tent, he could not wait, but ran to meet them.

"Oh, Evelyn! aren't you pleased? I was so afraid once that we should be beaten."

"Yes; it was a near run: it was that last catch that saved us."

"And I suppose all your sympathies were with the blues: none to bestow on my gallant reds, eh, young man?" asked Lord Manvers.

"Why of course I wanted Evelyn to win," replied Willy, looking up at him. "I couldn't help that, you know!"

"No: I suppose not. No one has any chance with you where he is concerned. I can't think how it is,—my small brothers don't think half so much of me: what does he do for you, eh?" he continued, with a comical sort of look.

"Everything!" answered Willy, his eyes kindling; "and I love him more than the whole world!"

Neither of his hearers could help smiling, but there was a look on his brother's face, as he passed his arm round his shoulders, that contained a full response, though he said nothing. Soon they reached the tent and were joined by the others. During this week Sir Evelyn made some inquiries about Johnny Cave, and finding that he was in a most forlorn condition, deputed Wilson to negotiate with a woman who kept one of the park lodges, that he might board and lodge there: he would send him to school then till he was old enough to work for himself. He did this chiefly for Willy's sake, but said not a word to him at first.

All was arranged satisfactorily, and next Sunday Johnny was sent for to the Hall. It so happened that Willy was alone in the garden. The footman pointed out where he would find him, and then went back. Willy looked up, but for the first moment did not recognise him,—he was so neatly dressed and looked so

clean and tidy, so utterly different from the miserable, neglected child of his former acquaintance.

"Why, Johnny," he exclaimed breathlessly: "can it really be you! What has come to you?"

Johnny eagerly explained, and which of the two rejoiced most over Sir Evelyn's thoughtful kindness it would be hard to tell. Tenderly the one child, reared in all the refinements of abundant wealth and luxury, entered into the overflowing feelings of the other, now enjoying for the first time anything like sufficiency, and gently he led his thoughts away to the gracious Hand from which all good things do come. Johnny listened almost tearfully: he thought of his mother, and all that Willy had been to her. The good seed fell on a willing little heart, and long after, when that sweet childish spirit could minister to him no more, bore its unfading fruit. They had been so engrossed with each other that they did not perceive that they were watched, and with no friendly eyes. Lady Cairne passing through the garden saw them distinctly, and a somewhat malicious smile passed over her features. She knew that Willy had been forbidden by his brother to have any more intercourse with Johnny Cave: he had told her so himself. Here, then, was a case of direct disobedience; yes, and of deceit, too, as he had evidently chosen this place out of sight and hearing of the house. She went straight in, and not finding Evelyn about, proceeded to the study. He was there writing.

"What do you think, Evelyn?" she exclaimed excitedly. "What do you suppose I have just seen?"

He was startled for the moment, and inquired hastily if anything was the matter.

"Yes, indeed. I have just seen Willy himself, in

spite of what you told him, sitting in the lower arbour with that little wretch, Johnny Cave. There: what do you say to that?" she asked, letting her tone become a little too triumphant.

"It's all right, aunt Cairne," replied Evelyn, composedly, with only half-concealed amusement at her defeat. "I gave him leave to come up to see Willy. I've arranged for him now to live with old Jane Simpson, at the Lodge, so you need not be surprised if you see him here sometimes."

Her ladyship was thunder-struck. "Evelyn!" she burst forth at last: "How can you, how dare you run such a risk? What mayn't be the consequences, if you allow Willy to associate with such a creature as that!"

"It will do Willy no harm," he returned, with a quiet smile. "Whether the other will profit as he ought by being with him even now and then, remains to be seen."

Lady Cairne retired, discomfited. "It is monstrous," she exclaimed to Laura; "perfectly insane of Evelyn: but really his absurdities about that child are past all belief!"

Shortly after this James and Lewis Murray returned to school. The parting of the former with Willy was a singular contrast to those of past times. They had had more talks together, and he was full of new and earnest resolves for the time to come. So much may one faithful young soldier of the Cross do for the soul of a careless one at his side!

On the same day Lady Cairne and Laura set off for a three weeks' visit to Edinburgh; so Evelyn, Harry Wyndham, and Willy were left alone. Those were

happy days to Willy: they were so invariably kind to him, always seeming rather pleased than not to have him with them. Firefly and Snowdrop were constantly side by side as usual, only that now another of Sir Evelyn's beautiful horses, with Harry Wyndham for its rider, was added to the group.

At last came a letter from Lady Cairne, saying that they would be at Alliston on the following Thursday; and that she was bringing with her an orphan relative of her late dear husband, who was on her way to London, just to break the long journey, if Evelyn did not object, for two nights.

"Well done!" exclaimed Harry. "I call that tolerably cool. She has not given you time to object, seeing to-day is Tuesday."

"I suppose she thought there was no fear of that," returned Sir Evelyn, lightly, as he left the breakfast-table and went to speak to the steward.

"Did aunt Cairne say Thursday?" asked Willy, presently, in a tone that unconsciously betrayed a good deal.

"She did really," answered Mr. Wyndham, laughing. "Why Willy, you look as solemn as a judge about it. What's the matter, eh?"

"I've been so happy all this time with you and Evelyn."

He read in these simple words the explanation the child did not give, and understood perfectly.

"Well, but it won't make any difference in that way, . . my boy. I can answer for myself, and I'm sure it won't to Evelyn."

"No: I know it won't. And yet somehow it will be different."

At that moment Sir Evelyn returned, and the conversation changed.

"Willy doesn't seem to be looking forward much to Thursday," remarked Harry, when he had gone to the Rectory. "He says he has been so happy with you and me; which means, I suppose, that he does not quite expect the same now."

"Did he say so. I really don't wonder at that. It is quite extraordinary," continued Evelyn, "that aunt Cairne should persist in feeling towards that child as she does. And yet I cannot see that he ever wilfully gives her occasion for it."

"It's abominable!" exclaimed Harry. "I've often noticed it. Such a child as Willy, too. But I think I remember hearing long ago how desperately she resented his mother's advent here: it displaced her, you know; and I suppose she dislikes him for her sake."

"Very likely. And then I think she is jealous of the notice he gets from every one, and even of my love for him. You can't think how often she has tried to make mischief between us."

"Is it possible! I should hardly have thought even she dare venture on that."

"Yes: repeatedly. But she has never succeeded. Ah, well: this sort of thing won't go on for ever! Whenever the new 'Lady of Alliston appears,'" he added, laughing, "aunt Cairne will have to depart. I think I shall have done my duty then."

Carelessly as he spoke, Harry of course thought that his words could apply but to one person, and somewhat hastily turned the subject.

That afternoon, when Willy came home Evelyn and

his friend were sitting in the veranda with their newspapers, for it was too hot to go out at present. Harry was some little way off; but he could not help seeing the way in which Evelyn greeted him; and though he could not hear his words, he felt quite sure he was thinking of their morning's conversation. The ride that evening Willy always remembered as one of the very pleasantest he ever had.

CHAPTER XI.

“There’s not a wild flower blossoming,
With joy upspringing to a blush ;
Nor bird of all the joyous spring,
But with love’s tender light doth flush.”

THURSDAY came, and Lady Cairne returned to Alliston. It so happened that Willy stayed on with his companions at the Rectory that afternoon, and did not come in till just in time to go down after dinner. Sir Evelyn, meanwhile, received his Aunt very dutifully when he came into the drawing-room, for he too had been out till dressing time. Presently Laura appeared, and behind her the young stranger guest. Lady Cairne was about to introduce her, when he came quickly forward : “Is it possible ? surely I cannot be mistaken ?” and he shook hands with her warmly. How the colour mounted as she replied, raising her eyes to him in timid, though glad surprise, “I can hardly believe it. I never thought of seeing you here !”

“How : what is all this ?” exclaimed Lady Cairne, hurrying up. “Where in the world did you ever see Marian Leslie before, Evelyn ?”

“In Scotland I had that pleasure : we were travellers together, on one very well remembered day, though I certainly never hoped to meet again here. You must introduce us properly, aunt Cairne, if you please,” he

added, not noticing the sudden cloud on her ladyship's brow.

"Nonsense," she exclaimed, peevishly: "a mere child as she is. I have told you her name, Evelyn: 'Marian Leslie; ' she can't help knowing yours, of course."

Harry Wyndham had been a silent but most interested spectator of this little scene; he was much amused at Lady's Cairne's evident discomforture and impatience. Willy had often talked to him of their unknown fellow-traveller: certainly as he looked at the downcast face, he thought no description of her had been exaggerated.

"You have not forgotten your little friend, have you?" asked Sir Evelyn. "He often talks of you still."

"No, indeed: I have been longing to ask about him. Is he here? And shall I see him?"

"Yes: he'll come in after dinner. Only imagine his astonishment when he sees you."

Just then dinner was announced. Sir Evelyn at once offered his arm to his guest, Lady Cairne following with Mr. Wyndham, Laura had to go in for once alone. It was well perhaps for May that she did not see Lady Cairne's face as Sir Evelyn seated her beside him, and engaged her in pleasant, easy conversation during dinner. Laura could not with all her efforts entirely engross him. No one would have supposed from the young girl's quiet, graceful self-possession, that this was the first time in her life that she had seen anything half so magnificent as the every-day dinner table at Alliston that night, with its costly damask and glittering silver; its flowers and lights, the array of servants too, and varied courses, all contrasted strangely with the sim-

plicity of the old Scotch manse, which had been her home till now. Only lately had she seen anything of the gay world, when she had been for a few months in Edinburgh, at the house of a friend. When dinner was over, the bell was rung as usual for Willy: he came almost directly, but perhaps with somewhat more than his usual quietness: Lady Cairne's presence seemed generally to have a sort of quieting effect upon him. His eye fell upon Marian Leslie: he gazed earnestly for a moment, then, with a little cry of joy, and an involuntary, "Oh, Evelyn!" he rushed to her, flung his arms round her neck, and kissed her eagerly. She seemed about as much delighted as he, as she warmly returned his caress.

"Oh, how did you come? Evelyn, aren't you glad? Did you know before?" he exclaimed, turning to him with sparkling eyes.

"No, indeed, Willy," he replied, smiling at the pair. "I was quite as much surprised as you were; but I wouldn't tell you, for I wanted to see if you remembered your friend."

"Why, I never *could* forget her, Evelyn. I've got the little book quite safely," he added, in an earnest whisper, "and I've read it over and over again."

"Well, Willy," burst forth Lady Cairne, from her end of the table, "this I suppose is what you call a proper way of meeting your Aunt, after a month's absence. It is not the sort of manners I have been used to, certainly."

"Oh, aunt Cairne, I'm very sorry, but I *was* so surprised!" and he went up to her and innocently put up his face for a kiss.

"Oh no!" she replied, coldly turning away. "Love

that's asked for is not worth the having. You can treat other people differently it seems."

How Harry Wyndham longed to send his plate at her head; it would have been such a relief to his feelings at that moment. Willy did not succeed much better with Laura: she just shook hands with him, that was all. And he returned to his place at Evelyn's side with a sort of doubtful look, as if he had been guilty of something very dreadful; but his brother's manner as he drew him within his arm and quietly turned the conversation considerably reassured him. Almost immediately afterwards Lady Cairne rose to go.

"Marian," she said, when they reached the drawing-room, and a few words had been exchanged between herself and Laura, "I am sure you must be tired after your journey, and these late hours are so different from what you have been used to; you can go to bed now if you like. Can you find your way do you think?"

"I think so," returned May, as she turned reluctantly from the window where she had been standing, admiring the lovely gardens and terraces of bright flowers. But the hint was too obviously given; and her awe of Lady Cairne and Laura too great to allow her to think of not taking it. On the stairs she met Willy. He had stayed on as usual a few minutes with Evelyn, and now was on his way to bed.

"I'm afraid I never shall find my way," she said, as she joined him. "Will you show me?"

He laughingly asked her whereabouts she thought it was, as there were many rooms in the house that he had never even seen. May described it as well as she could.

"Oh, it must be one of the south terrace rooms. This

way then," and he pioneered her down several of the long corridors, and reached the right one at last.

"Good night!" he said, lovingly, as they stood together for a moment at the door. "How very glad I am that you're come."

"Yes: isn't it wonderful! How little I dreamed when Lady Cairne told me I was to stay two nights with her at Alliston who I should find here."

Meanwhile her ladyship was holding forth to Laura on Willy's unpardonable conduct to herself, of which, as usual, Evelyn had taken no notice, and the absurd fuss he had made with Marian.

"Well, at any rate," she remarked, "there won't be the necessity of his taking her in to dinner to-morrow night, for Charlotte Rivers will be here, and next week you know the Herberts come, and Evelyn's two friends besides."

"Yes: but Marian will be gone then. Surely those people in London said Saturday, didn't they?"

"Yes: thank goodness. She will be safe off before they come; but we shall have had enough of her by that time, I think. Mind, Laura, you always look after her and keep her near you when I am out of the way: she is very much inclined to be forward, I see."

Just then the gentlemen came in.

"Marian Leslie was very anxious to retire," said Lady Cairne to Sir Evelyn. "You see she has been so utterly unaccustomed to this sort of life and the ways of society, that I daresay she feels strange and out of place here."

It did cross Sir Evelyn's mind that seldom, even among the highest circles, had he seen anything more perfectly well-bred and refined than his young guest's

whole appearance and demeanour that evening, but he said nothing.

Next day Miss Rivers arrived. She seemed a rather good-natured indolent kind of girl, and quite as willing to be friendly with May as with any one else; but Laura took such entire possession of her, that the latter felt more than ever alone except when with Willy or Sir Evelyn. He, she thought, seemed to go out of his way to be kind to her, and how grateful she felt to him could not be told. He was engaged as usual nearly all the morning. After luncheon he went out riding with Harry Wyndham and Willy. Lady Cairne and the three girls took a solemn drive in the open carriage. May enjoyed the beautiful country they passed through; but could not enter much into the conversation, most of which was evidently not meant for her. Sir Evelyn, of course had to take in Miss Rivers that evening; and in the drawing-room afterwards she and Laura contrived so continuously to detain him, that he could not, without positive rudeness, get away. He saw Harry Wyndham in a distant part of the room, evidently enjoying the fresh somewhat original conversation of the young Scotch lassie. On the following morning,—the day fixed for her departure from Alliston,—the letters came in as usual at breakfast time, and one was handed to May. She was expecting it: for she had written by Lady Cairne's desire to the lady to whom she was going in London, asking if she could be met by the afternoon train. Something seemed to startle her. She looked up hastily, and seeing every one else occupied with their letters excepting Lady Cairne, who did not happen to have one that morning, she leaned forward, saying low and anxiously:—

"Lady Cairne, what shall I do? I have just got this from Mrs. Forrester, and she says they will not return from Brighton till next Saturday. She wants to know if I can wait till then. But what can I say? How can I help going to-day?"

Very innocently she spoke; for she really did not see who else she was to go to in her difficulty; but the ominous frown that gathered on Lady Cairne's brow rather startled her.

"Hush, hush!" she whispered, hurriedly, with an anxious glance towards Sir Evelyn, who, however, appeared entirely engrossed with his letters. "You should not have mentioned it now. It need make no difference to your going to-day. I will arrange for you to go to a friend of mine till then: she will only be too glad to oblige me."

May's eyes fell. What dreadful mistake had she made. She felt quite bewildered; and the idea of encountering another set of strangers was anything but reassuring.

"But, aunt Cairne," said Sir Evelyn, raising his head and looking at her across the table: "why should Miss Leslie leave here to-day at all? Why should she not stay on till her friends are ready to receive her?"

"Oh no, Evelyn, I could not think of such a thing!" she replied, hastily, vexed beyond measure that he had heard. "I only asked for her to stay the two nights, just to break the journey: besides, all those people are coming next week, you know."

"Well, surely that need make no difference," laughed Sir Evelyn. "Considering the amount of spare rooms there are, they couldn't occupy them all. At any rate, Miss Leslie," he added, turning towards her, "will you

decide for yourself what you would like to do. I need not say *how* welcome you are at Alliston for as long as you can conveniently stay."

What a grateful glance the half-tearful hazel eyes flashed upon him as she replied, low,—

"Thank you very much, Sir Evelyn: you are very kind. I had much rather stay here, if,—if—"

One of the little looks that Willy knew most about answered her: but he looked away again as he said, "You will consider that matter settled then, aunt Cairne, if you please. Miss Leslie has done me the honour to say that she will stay here."

Her Ladyship simply bowed. She was too thoroughly angry to reply, though apparently she was occupied with the new *Illustrated News*, which, being Saturday, had just arrived.

"I am glad you are going to stay," whispered Willy, as he passed May on his way to the Rectory. Lady Cairne just caught the words, and her wrath reached its climax! When they entered the morning-room after breakfast it burst forth unrestrainedly, in spite of the presence of Miss Rivers, as well as Laura.

"Marian, I am amazed, astonished at you. How could you do such a thing: how could you think of asking Sir Evelyn Alliston to let you stay on in his house in that way? I never was so annoyed in my life, especially as I had been the means of bringing you here!"

May was struck dumb. The charge was so utterly unfounded, so unexpected, she could scarcely find words to speak.

"Oh, Lady Cairne!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "What can you mean? I never asked him, or thought of such a thing. He asked me, and I said Yes."

"Asked you, indeed!" repeated her Ladyship, irritably. "What else could he do when you made such a speech as that in his hearing. In the merest common politeness he could not have helped himself, of course."

"I'll go: I'll go!" sobbed May, impetuously. "I'll tell him that I'd rather go anywhere than stay here if he doesn't wish it."

Lady Cairne saw she had gone a little too far. If Sir Evelyn did hear of this how angry he would be, and she never did relish *that*. "Nonsense child: don't be absurd. I never said he did not wish it. The thing is done now, and the less said about it the better; only remember for the future that these sort of arrangements are much better not discussed at a strange breakfast table."

She turned away, and May retreated hastily to her own room, just catching Laura's remark as she went out:

"Well, Mamma, I hope this is the last time you will ever have to do with other people's children in this way."

She found her own room just then invaded by the housemaids, so seeing the school-room door open, which she knew was Willy's special domain, and where he had begged her to come if ever she wanted a book, she went in, and shutting the door, she sat down on a low seat by the window and gave way to an uncontrollable burst of tears. She was almost a child still: only just eighteen years had taught her their stern lessons of the world and its ways, and during the whole of that time she had been tenderly shielded from its slightest frown.

Here it may be well to digress for a moment, and say a word about her early life. Her father, an officer

in the army, had died in India while she was but an infant ; but she and her widowed mother had found a happy home in the pretty, peaceful manse in Perthshire, where Mrs. Leslie's only brother lived. He gladly shared his home with them, for the story of his own life had been a sad one, and he was lonely now. The little one grew up beside them in her fresh young beauty, cherished by both as their one remaining joy, and the idol of the whole village. But a malignant fever struck down the beloved pastor in the midst of his days and usefulness, and one week after Mrs. Leslie followed. Terrible was the shock of this double bereavement to the orphan girl. She had been at once removed to the house of a friend, who treated her with the utmost kindness ; but sadly she felt that she was now indeed "alone in the world." Her father's relations had never noticed her. She knew she had nothing to expect from them ; for he came of a noble race, and the proud Leslie had never forgiven his imprudent love marriage with the beautiful though penniless daughter of a neighbouring laird. Her kind friend, Mrs. Hamilton, insisted on keeping her with her for the present, and when she went to Edinburgh for the winter May accompanied her. But unexpected family circumstances eventually rendered it impossible for her longer to continue her almost motherly kindness to the desolate orphan, and thus she had to seek another home. Mrs. Leslie had left written directions, which were found among her papers after her death, that in case of her child ever being left alone, she was to send a sealed letter, the whereabouts of which was described, to an only cousin of hers, a Mrs. Forrester, then living in London. She and Mrs. Leslie had been like sisters in their

early days, and the poor mother touchingly commended her darling to her care. They had lost sight of each other latterly, for Mrs. Forrester had married a well-to-do London merchant, and was now an active, busy woman of the world, with daughters of her own to bring out, and one or two younger children besides; and happening just then to be in want of a governess, she resolved to make a virtue of necessity, and receive her young relative as a convenient substitute. Thus it came about that little May was on her way to London. Lady Cairne, whose husband had been nearly related to the Leslies, had, on the ground of a slight acquaintance with Mrs. Hamilton, and in a fit of unwonted amiability, volunteered to escort her as far as Alliston.

Poor little May! Many thoughts of her past young life came over her now, as she sat alone in the quiet school-room.

"Oh, mother," she murmured: "if you could but come back to me again! I've no one to love me now."

This was the first time in her life that harsh, unfeeling words had ever been addressed to her, and she felt them with all the bitterness of a young heart's first pang! Her meditations were rather suddenly interrupted. It so happened that Sir Evelyn was roaming about the house in search of some fishing tackle, as he and Mr. Wyndham intended to try their luck in the brook that morning; and recollecting that he had once lent some of it to Willy, he most unceremoniously opened the school-room door and walked in, whistling a lively tune as he did so. At the sight of that drooping figure by one of the windows he started back.

"Miss Leslie! I beg your pardon: I did not know

any one was here. Can I,—won't you allow me to send some one to you?" he added, advancing a step nearer himself, however, as the girl raised her head with a look up at him of which she was hardly conscious.

"What is it?" he asked, anxiously. "Is there anything I can do?"

At that kind tone all May's self-imposed resolves gave way, and hardly staying to think what she was doing, she poured out all her story, exclaiming through her tears, "Oh, Sir Evelyn, I cannot bear that I should even seem to have done such a thing as ask you to let me stay on here! I would not for the world. Do believe me that I never once thought of it!"

For one moment he was silent. Was he never to be free from Lady Cairne's unscrupulous machinations and interference!

"What can I say to you?" he said at last in a low voice, bending down towards her as he spoke. "How am I to assure you on this point, Miss Leslie: do you suppose that such an idea ever for a single instant crossed my mind?"

"No, I didn't: I could not. But I was so taken by surprise: no one ever spoke to me like that before." And she tried hard to keep back her tears.

"Poor child," he said compassionately: "I wish I could have spared you this, it grieves me that you should have been treated so in this house; but you must try not to mind about it any more."

"Oh, indeed I don't a bit now, Sir Evelyn," she answered earnestly, with a little April smile at last. "I am only so sorry to have troubled you with it; but when you spoke to me it all came out somehow: I could not help myself."

“I think it is I who ought to apologize; but I am so used to be Willy’s comforter on all occasions, that you must forgive me for talking to you so unceremoniously,” he added, with a little smile that curiously put her at her ease with him.

He went on then in his kind way, talking to her till she had almost forgotten her trouble; when suddenly remembering that Harry Wyndham was waiting for him all this time, he was hastening from the room, when a low and anxiously spoken, “Sir Evelyn!” arrested him.

“I want you to promise me one thing,” she said, speaking with some difficulty. “Will you please not to say anything to Lady Cairne about all this?”

“I cannot promise that,” he replied, gravely. “It is my imperative duty to stop such proceedings as this: I *must* speak.”

“Oh, no, no! pray don’t,—for my sake,” she added, innocently. “Don’t you see what it would bring upon me?”

He did see: perhaps it had not struck him before. How unconsciously lovely she looked as she stood there: her whole soul in the wistful eyes that were raised to his.

“It is hard to resist such pleading,” he said, at last; “but if I yield, will you promise me not to let a thought of it trouble you again?”

“It will not indeed,” she answered brightly; and then he went. May sat on in the school-room for some little time longer, thinking over that interview, and wondering how two people in the same house could be so different. When at last she rejoined the others downstairs, the storm had apparently blown over. She

met Sir Evelyn again at luncheon, and a little half enquiring smile from him, that no one else saw, was answered by such a happy one, that he hoped she was really keeping her promise. He presently suggested that it would be very pleasant for the ladies to come and sit under the trees by the stream that afternoon, as they were going to fish again, and it was really too hot for either riding or driving then. Laura assented instantly, so did Miss Rivers: so it was settled. "Would any of you care to fish, too?" asked Sir Evelyn. "Willy has several light rods, if you like to try."

"No, thank you," laughed Miss Rivers: "it will be quite fatiguing, enough to see you: a novel is about all I feel equal to to-day."

Laura quite agreed. How dearly somebody else would have liked it: but she did not speak. Just then Willy came in; Evelyn called him to his side, and told him what they were going to do: he was delighted.

"But I didn't say you were to go, too, young man, did I?" said Evelyn, giving him a piece of the melon he was eating. "Don't you think we shall be enough without you, eh?"

"Oh, I know you mean me to go, though," he answered, joyfully. He had too many remembrances of happy hours by the brook alone with his brother, to suppose for a moment that he was in earnest. "And are you going?" he added, turning to May. "How nice it will be."

It certainly was very delicious under the trees on the banks of the rippling shaded stream; but May did not get on very fast with her book. Willy was near, Sir Evelyn at no great distance off, Harry Wyndham a little further down. Presently Willy turned. "Won't

you come and try?" he said, to May, when he saw that she was not reading. "Do take my rod for a minute: I want to run and see what Mr. Wyndham has just caught."

Even Laura could find nothing to object to in this, especially as Evelyn was now a good way further off. May got up eagerly, and took the rod from Willy's hand. "I never fished before," she said, laughingly: "I don't know how I shall manage."

He showed her how to throw in, and then ran off. She stood patiently for some time, but the float remained still as ever on the dimpling water. All at once it began to move up and down, and instinctively she looked round for Willy: but he was far away. She perceived however, that Sir Evelyn was considerably nearer than he had been at first.

"What's the matter?" he said, amused, as he caught her look and came towards her. "A bite? Take care: wait till he's fairly on. Now then, pull: gently!" he added, as May gave a sudden jerk, and up came the empty line dangling in the air. Her face of blank disappointment was too much for her companion. "Never mind," he said, laughing: "try again: he won't be far off. The bait's gone at any rate." He put her on a fresh one, and stood by her side while she tried once more. This time she was more successful, and a fine perch was landed on the grass. Her almost child-like delight was unbounded.

"Capital!" said Sir Evelyn, as he took out the hook and examined the fish with his practised eye. "Would you like to try again?"

"Oh, very much indeed: but I'm afraid I am interrupting your fishing.

"I couldn't do all that though," she added: half shrinking at what he was doing just then.

"You'll come to it in time," he replied, as he laughingly put the rod freshly baited into her hand. But at that moment Laura sauntered up.

"I think after all, Evelyn, I should like to try. I can have that rod I suppose?"

"It is Willy's," he answered, quietly, and he lent it to Miss Leslie. I'll soon fetch you another from the house, if you'll wait."

"No: I should like this best; I know it is the lightest."

May instantly gave it up. "Please take it, Miss Cairne: I can watch you just as well."

"You'd better go back under the trees now, hadn't you?" was the reply. "You have been standing here so long."

"But you would like to go on fishing, Miss Leslie?" said Sir Evelyn, looking at her. "Will you come up to the house and choose a rod for yourself, if it is not too hot. I have several light ones there."

"Thank you," she replied, simply: and not seeing why she should refuse the kind offer, she turned at once to go with him. How incensed somebody was! but as it was entirely her own doing,—she had not a word to say. She had not exactly calculated on fishing alone. Meanwhile Sir Evelyn and his companion strolled leisurely towards the house.

Harry Wyndham just turned as they passed. He could not help noticing admiringly the contrast of the two figures; but as the remembrance of some one else crossed his mind, he half-smiled to himself at his involuntary thought. Lady Cairne was out. She had

driven to Overstone, notwithstanding the heat. They went in through the open library window.

"Will you come this way?" said Sir Evelyn, entering the study. "All the fishing-rods are here."

"What a beautiful room!" exclaimed May, involuntarily. "I never was here before."

It was in truth a beautiful room. Sir Evelyn had pleased himself with collecting in this, his favourite retreat, all that could gratify a refined and highly-cultivated taste; and the results of this, combined with abundant resources, were everywhere evident. Exquisite pictures and statuettes, stands of the choicest flowers, and above all, books: books everywhere met her admiring eye.

"This is my sanctum," said Sir Evelyn, amused; "where no one is supposed to come except by special invitation. Willy considers himself an exception, I believe; but then he seems to imagine that wherever I am he must be, so he is here with me pretty constantly."

"I don't wonder at that," returned May, her eye still wandering over the well filled book cases. He saw this.

"I hope you will allow me to extend the privilege to you, Miss Leslie. If ever you have a fancy for any book here, will you remember that?" he added, with a smile, as he brought the fishing rods for her inspection.

She thanked him gratefully; and then when a rod was found that exactly suited her, they returned to the brook. Laura had soon tired of her fishing, and had rejoined her friend under the trees.

"Just like that girl!" she exclaimed, impatiently, as she sat down; "to go off with Evelyn in this way! Did you ever see anything so forward as she is?"

"What?" asked Miss Rivers, just looking up from her book. "But you took the rod she was fishing with, didn't you?" She was a great deal too lazy and comfortable to exert herself to discuss the subject, and besides was very much absorbed in her novel just then. Laura said no more. May was very successful, and captured several more fish. Altogether, to most of the party at least, that afternoon by the quiet stream had been one of unmixed pleasure.

Sunday came next, with its stillness and peace. Willy was over-joyed at having May all to himself in the afternoon walk to church: and then afterwards under the old lime tree they sat and talked of the things they loved best, till the soft evening began to fall. It was only by the child's unconscious words now and then that May began to perceive that the brightness of his otherwise most happy home was not altogether unclouded. Very wisely, very tenderly, without directly seeming to do so, she laid gentle words of love and counsel within his reach. Little he suspected that she knew, almost as well as if he had told her, what was his one great trial with regard to his dear Evelyn whom he loved so devotedly, and what the daily cross of Lady Cairne's provocation and injustice; neither did he guess how his own sweet simple faith and love encouraged and strengthened the young fellow-pilgrim at his side. Long, long remembered by both was this and several other quiet talks they had together.

Monday, Evelyn was absent nearly all day on business: he did not come back till just dinner time.

"And what have you been doing all day, Miss Leslie?" he inquired, when soup and fish had been discussed. "Did you see anything new in your drive?"

"I did not drive," she answered simply: "I stayed with Willy."

She did not add that as Lady Cairne and Laura were going to make some special calls, she had not even been asked to accompany them. Her ladyship looked up quickly as she heard Sir Evelyn's question; but as May went on she resumed her conversation with Miss Rivers, considerably relieved.

"I enjoyed my walk so much. Willy took me to the Home Wood, I think he called it; and when we came back we had some croquet."

"Did you?" he said, with interest. "How did you play?"

"Willy and I against Miss Rivers and Miss Cairne: and we won. He played beautifully."

"Oh, he had your mallet," remarked Laura; "that gave him an advantage, of course! But he always seems to think it is his property when you are away."

Sir Evelyn laughed. "He shall have one of his own soon." And there was, Laura thought, a meaning twinkle in his eye. Just then a note was brought in from the Priory: an answer to be waited for.

"They're come back then, at any rate," he said, as he glanced his eye over it. "Oh, all right! Say, if you please, that I will ride over the first thing after breakfast to-morrow. I need not write."

Harry Wyndham thought he looked particularly happy after that. But if he had only known! It was but a line from the old Colonel about a new farming machine that he had got over on inspection, and wanted to consult his young friend about; for he had great confidence in his mechanical knowledge. So ingenious are some people in tormenting themselves!

That evening Evelyn chanced to go into his dressing-room for something he wanted to show Mr. Wyndham. The door into Willy's room was open. He just put his head in as he passed.

"What not in bed yet?" as he saw him standing in his little night-gear by the window, evidently quite ready, but having one more look out.

"Oh, Evelyn, do come and look! It is so lovely, I couldn't help staying a minute."

He came to his side and looked out too. It was indeed lovely. The gardens, with their sloping lawns and grand old trees, and beyond the faint outlines of the park and the misty lake, all seemed so cool and fresh and dewy, after the fierce heat of the day.

"Can you see that little silver band across the water, where the moon-light falls, Willy?" he asked, presently.

"No," he said, trying to raise himself. "Where?"

Evelyn stooped and lifted him in his arms. "There: now you can."

"Oh, yes: how beautiful!" and then for some minutes neither spoke.

"By the way, young man," said Evelyn, rather suddenly, at last: "do you know I've an account to settle with you? How came you to think of taking my mallet to-day, without my leave: eh?"

For one moment Willy looked up anxiously; but as he caught his brother's eye, he exclaimed, with a bright laugh, "Why, Evelyn, you always let me play with your's, because it's shorter, you know; and sometimes even when you are playing against me!"

"Well, I cannot allow it for the future. So now look here," he added, as he carried him off to his dressing-room, and opened a drawer in one of the cabinets:

"Will you let me keep mine now, all to myself?" As he spoke he put into his hand the most beautiful mallet that Willy had ever seen.

"Oh, but, Evelyn, this is not for me!" he exclaimed breathlessly. And then, as he perceived his own initials in dark blue enamel and gold on the top of the mallet's head, such a look of extreme childish delight came into his eyes, that Evelyn was more than repaid. He had amused himself by ordering the very best that could be made for money, and as it had happened to arrive that day he thought he might as well have the pleasure of it at once, especially after Laura's remark.

"Dear Evelyn, how very kind of you: you're always thinking of me," said Willy, with a grateful kiss, as his disengaged arm stole round his neck.

"I thought you would like it, my boy," returned Sir Evelyn in a pleased tone: "it's just about right for you, I think."

"Yes. I wish to-morrow was come that I might try it: May wants to have another game."

"Who?" asked Evelyn.

"Oh, I forgot! She asked me to call her May, and wouldn't let me say Miss Leslie any more. You don't mind, do you?"

"Aunt Cairne never calls her so," remarked Evelyn, not answering his question.

"No: but her mother always did, she says. Don't you remember it was in that little book she gave me?"

What a thing it is to be a child, thought Sir Evelyn, with a half-envious look at the unconscious little white-robed figure in his arms, now absorbed again with his new treasure.

"You don't seem inclined to part with that," he said

laughing at him. "Do you mean to take it to bed with you?"

"I shall put it quite near," he answered merrily: "that I may see it the first thing when I wake."

Next morning he brought it in at breakfast-time to show, and the universal admiration it excited satisfied even him. Laura jestingly remarked, with perhaps a little more venom in her tone than she was aware of:

"It's a pity, Evelyn, that you did not have the initials inlaid with diamonds and rubies at once: Willy might have liked it better then, you know!"

"Well," laughed Sir Evelyn, good humouredly: "I can hardly say. Perhaps you would have thought that rather a doubtful possibility if you had seen its reception last night."

Presently Lady Cairne remarked, "I wonder what we can do to amuse all those young people when they come? I should think we might get up a picnic or something of the kind this week. What do you say, Evelyn?"

"By all means. What place did you think of?"

"Oh, Evelyn!" began Willy: but he was silenced by an impatient glance from her Ladyship.

"Well," asked his brother with a smile, not noticing it: "and what have you to suggest?"

"I was thinking you once promised to go to Oakdale Wood, and the wishing-well. I was telling May about it, and wished she could see it."

Her colour deepened a little as Sir Evelyn turned amused, half inquiringly towards his young guest. "I've no objection, I'm sure. But you must not raise your expectations too much, Miss Leslie: Willy's ideas are very exalted as to the wonders of the "wishing-well."

"Oh, but please don't think of me!" she replied, timidly, detecting the look that passed between Lady Cairne and her daughter, "if there is any other place that you like better."

"I don't know of any, particularly. I think it is as good a place as we could fix upon: don't you, aunt Cairne?"

"As well that as any other," she replied, with apparent indifference, Oakdale being the very place she had decided on in her own mind, for private reasons; "but the invitations must go out directly, if we are to have much of a party. Thursday, I suppose, we had better say?"

"Yes: that will suit me perfectly. I can ask the Eversleys myself, when I ride over in the morning."

"Always those Eversleys!" thought Lady Cairne; but she knew it was useless to interfere about them.

"One thing I am determined upon," she said, coming into Laura's room soon after breakfast: "that forward little thing, Marian Leslie, shall not go. I have no patience with the way she goes on with Willy: everyone can see what it's for!"

"But, mamma, how in the world will you prevent it? What would Evelyn say?"

"I shall send a note to Katherine Dering," replied her mother, composedly, "and tell her to come here to-day; and then I can ask her for Thursday, as a matter of course. Evelyn will not know that she did not call by accident."

"Well: I hope you'll succeed, I'm sure," said Laura, laughing. "It will be a great comfort not to have her to look after; but I think it is rather a venture."

But Lady Cairne quietly put her plan into execution

and succeeded, too, as she usually did for a time in most of her manœuvres.

The Miss Herberts arrived that day. They were fine, fashionable looking girls, great friends of Laura's, and apparently devoted to her. They were quite aware that it would not answer to interfere in any of her private affairs, and always left the field clear as far as Sir Evelyn Alliston himself was concerned; for they supposed, as indeed most of Lady Cairne's friends did, that there had long been an understanding between the cousins, and that the engagement would ere long be announced. Colonel Grey and Mr. Westmore, a young Lieutenant in the army, came later. They had all met before, so there was soon plenty of fun going on: a young party in a large country house generally find enough to amuse them. May felt more alone than ever. The Miss Herberts had, of course, taken Laura's cue, and were distantly patronising. The gentlemen she did not see, as she was out with Willy when they came. There was a dinner party in the evening. When she entered the spacious drawing-room in her white dress, its only ornament some brilliant geraniums that Willy had given her, she felt like some little wood-flower in the midst of gay exotics.

"Who is that?" exclaimed Colonel Grey, as May crossed the room, and seated herself unobserved as she hoped, in a quiet corner. He was a thorough man of the world, and had seen many beauties in his day, but there was something in that fair young face that evidently struck him.

"Only a little Scotch sort of cousin of poor papa's, on her way from Edinburgh to London," replied Laura. "Her father was in his regiment in India. Mamma

only asked her here just to break the journey: she is leaving directly."

"What name did you say?" asked the Colonel, his eye still following her. "Leslie! It is a good name, and of course she is well connected; but her father was a younger son, and made some imprudent marriage, so the family took no notice of her."

At that moment dinner was announced, and the conversation dropped. In the evening there was music and singing; Laura played brilliantly, and the Miss Herbert's sang some fashionable songs and duets. No one of course asked May. Sir Evelyn at last discovered her retreat a little way inside the conservatory.

"Don't you sing, Miss Leslie?" he asked, somewhat eagerly: "I have never asked you?"

She looked up. "Oh, no: hardly at all. I just sing a little to amuse myself; sometimes a few old Scotch songs."

"Won't you make an exception now?" he asked, with a smile: "I should like an old Scotch ballad better than anything."

"But indeed it would be nothing to listen to after what we have just had;" and she glanced towards the drawing-room.

"Never mind: come and sing one for me. If I don't like it I will promise to tell you."

May yielded at once, in spite of her unwillingness, as Sir Evelyn offered her his arm; fortunately she did not see the looks that fell upon her when they entered the room. She seated herself at the piano, struck a few chords, and then rose the plaintive exquisite melody of "Auld Robin Grey." Her voice was clear and sweet, not powerful, but every word was distinctly

heard. Even the ladies ceased their talk, and there was perfect silence, when with strangely tender pathos the last notes died away. As she rose from her seat there was a little murmur of almost involuntary applause. But she missed the only word of approval that she had cared to hear, and looking up, perceived that Sir Evelyn was not there: he had moved quite away, and seemed hardly conscious that the song was finished. Colonel Grey pressed forward:

"Pray give us another, Miss Leslie,—one more. I never knew what was in that song before."

"Not now," she murmured; wondering a little in her heart why, as Sir Evelyn had asked her to sing, that he should seem less attentive than anyone else. He must have been disappointed then very much she was afraid.

Colonel Grey led her to a seat by the window. "You have given us a great treat, Miss Leslie: but we ought to have another."

Before May could reply, Laura suddenly claimed him to give his opinion about some plan they were arranging for Thursday, and May was left alone. She was turning over a book of photographs rather abstractedly, conscious of a little troubled feeling she could hardly define, when a voice said, close beside her, in low, almost unsteady tones, "I do not know how to thank you, Miss Leslie, for that song. How strange that you should have chosen that above all others."

She looked up: a startled look of very mingled feelings, as she replied, "I am very glad: I fancied you did not like it."

"It was my mother's favourite song," he answered in the same low tone: "the one I loved best to hear her

sing. It seemed like a dream of the past to me, for I have never heard it since."

Her eyes were raised to his with a look of wistful sympathy.

"How little I knew: I only thought you were so much disappointed."

"Disappointed! I only wish"—

But at that moment Lady Cairne passed.

"You had much better come away from that window, Marian, it's getting quite chilly now."

She rose instantly, and Sir Evelyn moved away.

The next morning further arrangements were made about the pic-nic: all was promising to be very enjoyable. Lady Cairne had invited Miss Dering, as she had intended; but for obvious reasons said nothing to May till the last moment. While the latter was dressing for dinner that night she came into her room, and said, with apparent indifference, "Marian, I have been obliged to fill up your place in the carriage to-morrow. Miss Dering called unexpectedly, and I could not avoid asking her, as she is a great friend of Evelyn's, and I knew he would wish it: besides all the party would have been strangers to you, so you could not have enjoyed it much."

Poor May, she was grievously disappointed; but acquiesced at once, of course, and tried her best not to show what she felt. It was rather hard work though, especially when during dinner there were animated discussions about the order of the day,—the walk to the wishing-well, etc.; but her sweet face was unclouded as ever: no one could have guessed what she was feeling. Afterwards she followed the other girls as they strolled out of the open drawing-room windows

into the garden. The shrubbery walk looked cool and inviting, and somehow she felt rather glad to be alone. She was slowly pacing up and down when Willy joined her; he had come to say good night, and began eagerly expatiating on the certainty of a beautiful day to-morrow. Something in her look struck him.

"Why don't you think it will be very nice? I thought you were so pleased."

"Yes, dear, so I am, for you. But I am not going."

"Not going!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. And May quietly explained.

His childish indignation was great.

"I shall go to aunt Cairne," he asserted, instantly. "She has no right to keep you at home. I am sure Evelyn"

"Oh, no, no, Willy! don't say a word; and especially not to Sir Evelyn. Only think what Lady Cairne would say to me."

But before she could stop him, he had darted off. He went straight to the dining-room where the gentlemen were still sitting over their wine. His courage almost failed him, for he did not know what Evelyn might say to his reappearance so long after his bed time.

"Hallo! what brings you back again?" said Colonel Grey, trying to catch him as he passed. But his eye instantly sought Evelyn; and going up to him he whispered something very earnestly in his ear.

"What can you want with me so specially to-night?" he asked, in an amused tone. "Won't it do to-morrow?"

"Oh no: please come for one minute. I must tell you to-night!"

"Shan't I do as well, Willy?" asked Mr. Wyndham.

"Come and tell me what you want, and I will promise to do it. I'm sure you won't get Evelyn to say that."

"No: no one but Evelyn will do!" and he looked up at him coaxingly.

"Will you excuse me, then, for a few moments," said Sir Evelyn to his guests, "if I must attend to this very important business to-night?"

"Certainly!" returned the Colonel, laughing. "Only we shall expect to be admitted into the secret: eh, young man!" he called out to Willy.

"I don't know about that," he answered, joyfully taking his brother's hand and drawing him out of the open window.

"Well, what is it?" said Evelyn, as they walked on to the end of the veranda, out of sight and hearing, his arm round Willy's shoulders, and his head bent low towards the very eager little face that was raised to his.

Willy in a few words told his story. Evelyn gave a low "whew" as he finished.

"I'm very glad you told me. Come with me into the study: I'll soon settle the matter."

"I knew you would!" exclaimed Willy, delighted. "But how shall you do it, Evelyn?"

"I shall write a line to Grace. I know Mrs. Wilton is intending to ride, so I will ask her to bring the old pony, with a side-saddle: I don't suppose Miss Leslie could manage one of our horses. We won't start, though, till the others are fairly off, and *then* how astonished somebody will be!" and he gave Willy a comical look, which the latter understood perfectly.

"Oh, Evelyn, how beautiful; how clever of you to think of it!" and he stood beside him and watched with great interest while he wrote a few rapid lines.

"Ring the bell," he said, as he finished: "it must go to-night, you know." Willy obeyed. "Tell Foster to send a man over with this to the Priory," said Sir Evelyn, when the footman came, "and to wait for an answer. There, that will do, I think," he continued to Willy, as he rose from the table. "And now I must go back, and you ought to be in bed, my boy. Stay, though, I forgot one thing. Can Miss Leslie ride, do you know?"

"Oh yes! She has told me how she liked it. She used to have a pony of her own, called Arran."

"That's all right," returned his brother, smiling; "but mind you don't say a word to any one." And Willy went off as happy as a prince.

Some little time after, as May was sitting on the pretty rustic seat under the lime tree, she perceived some one coming towards her. At first she did not see who it was; but as he came nearer, Sir Evelyn's tall figure was unmistakable. She looked round anxiously for a moment, as if to escape; not knowing whether Willy had been to him or not, and feeling afraid of what he might have said. But it was too late now.

"I see you have discovered my favourite retreat, Miss Leslie," he said, as he came up. "Have the others left you all alone?"

"No: I think I rather left them. It looked so cool and shady here. But Willy was with me till a few minutes ago."

"I've just seen him," he replied, as he seated himself. "He's off at last."

Involuntarily her eye sought his, but she could make out nothing.

"He very often comes here with me," continued Sir

Evelyn. "In fact, he calls that little seat his and this mine :" and he pointed, laughing, to a sort of little seat formed by the roots of the old tree.

"He seems nearly always with you, I think," said May.

"Yes: I often call him my little shadow. And yet he's never in my way. I like to have him. I often wonder what I should do without him now."

There was a tone in his voice that struck May, though she said nothing. She had had her own unaccountable thoughts about the child, and knew instinctively now that his brother had had the same.

"I never saw his like before," she said, presently. "I don't wonder at your love for him, Sir Evelyn."

"No: if he were really my child I could not love him better. And he is such a companion, too,—so intelligent and bright,—and I scarcely ever have to find fault with him, except about the merest trifles. Only once," he added, musingly, "has he ever really come to grief with me; and that was because he would not yield in a thing that he fancied wrong."

"Oh, I can understand that: that's just what I should have expected from him. But what a struggle it must have been for him, loving you as he does."

"Yes: poor child. I believe it half broke his heart. And yet, though a word would have saved him, he could not make up his mind to it. It is wonderful the hold that these strict religious notions have taken of him. If I had had him home before, such a thing could not have happened, you know."

"Oh, but Sir Evelyn," exclaimed May, her colour deepening almost painfully, and speaking with a great effort, "it is these very notions, as you call them, that

make Willy the child he is! You would not wish him different, would you?"

He half-smiled. "No, Miss Leslie, I cannot say I would. There may be some truth in that after all," he added, after a pause, more struck by her words than she knew. He had never taken just that view before. "I am right then in supposing that you are one of Willy's way of thinking too, eh?"

"I hope so: I want to be. But oh, not half so good as he is!" There were tears in her voice as she spoke.

"I thought you seemed to have a great deal in common from the first time you met," he replied, somewhat regretfully. "Well, I suppose it must be so. Perhaps it may come to me some day: who can tell. Willy does his little best for me, dear child, I'm sure; and sometimes I actually almost wish I could feel as he does."

An earnest word was on May's lips, but it died away. She hardly dare venture so far. How she wished afterwards that she had been more brave! But surely Sir Evelyn was changing a little even now. Once he would hardly have admitted even to himself the possibility of the wish he had just expressed. After a pause, he said, in his usual tone:—

"You know Willy has no secrets from me, Miss Leslie, so you will not be surprised that I know all the *intended* arrangements for to-morrow."

"Oh, I am so sorry! I begged him not to say anything. I would not for the world interfere with what you wish, Sir Evelyn!"

"I!" he exclaimed, looking at her in astonishment.

"Yes. Lady Cairne said that the young lady who had been invited was a great friend of yours, and that you had wished it; so please don't think more about me."

"She told you *that*, did she!" This was a little more than he anticipated.

"Yes: I understood so, certainly," answered May, almost alarmed at the momentary expression of his eye.

"And what did you think about it yourself?" and he turned towards her with a very different look. "I can only say I was quite as much surprised as Willy himself, and almost as indignant; and I am sure," he added, laughing, "there is no going beyond that!"

What a bound May's heart gave at these words: he then had not wished her to be excluded. She did not seem to care half so much about the disappointment now. Before she could reply the little silver bell, announcing tea, was rung out of the drawing-room window. May rose, as at that moment footsteps were heard approaching. Sir Evelyn went down by another path to give some last orders in the stables, so that when Lady Cairne appeared coming rather hurriedly down the shrubbery walk, she found May alone. That evening a note was brought to Sir Evelyn. If any one had watched, they might have seen a somewhat amused expression on his face as he read it. Grace wrote:—

"All right. Mabel and I are going with mamma in the carriage. Emma will ride, and bring the black pony. I am delighted.

"Yours ever, G. E."

She had heard a little about May Leslie the day before.

The next morning all was bustle and excitement. The day was splendid, not a cloud to be seen. Willy was delighted when Evelyn showed him Gracie's note,

and charged him not to say a word: Harry Wyndham was the only other who knew. Evelyn could not help watching May a little. All the other girls had come down equipped in dainty costumes for the drive, as the carriages were ordered for ten o'clock; but May, in her simple morning dress, outshone them all in his eyes! He noticed the way in which she helped everybody, apparently quite forgetful of herself, now here, now there,—finding a book for Miss Rivers, running upstairs for something that Lady Cairne wanted, buttoning a glove for Laura, and all with the most perfect, unruffled sweetness and good-temper. Even her Ladyship was a little struck by it, though she said nothing. At last the carriages drove off, every place filled as Lady Cairne had intended. May stood on the steps and watched them. The saddle horses were just coming round, so they would all be gone directly.

“Now, Miss Leslie, if you will go and get ready, we shall soon overtake them,” said Sir Evelyn, gravely.

May looked up at him in blank surprise. “I,—but I am not going!”

“You are, indeed, unless you prefer remaining at home; in which case we must stay and entertain you. I could not leave a guest alone.”

“But what do you mean, Sir Evelyn?” she asked, bewildered. “How can I go?”

“Oh, May!” cried Willy, joyfully. “Can’t you guess? Oh, it will be such fun!”

“Willy tells me you ride,” said Sir Evelyn, laughing and pulling his hair, “so I ventured to arrange that you should go with Mrs. Wilton and us. Was I right?”

“Oh, how very delightful!” she exclaimed, the roses

blossoming now. "How very kind of you. I do love riding dearly!"

"You have been used to it, then?"

"Yes, ever since I was a child; in a rough Scotchie way," she added with a smile, "so that I'm not afraid of anything; but I had some real lessons in Edinburgh and a new habit on purpose."

"Why, I shouldn't wonder then if you could ride Zephyr: she is a beautiful little Arab of mine, perfect for a lady, though, certainly, I never let anyone ride her but myself. Will you venture to try her?"

"I shall be delighted, if you are not afraid to trust me?"

"I am only thinking whether she is to be trusted," he returned with a smile, as he left the room to give the necessary orders, and May went to get ready.

"Aren't you glad, May?" said Willy, as they walked across the hall, their arms lovingly entwined. "I knew it last night, but Evelyn would not let me tell you."

"Did you?" she replied, musingly, thinking how she had wished them all good bye, and one or two other thoughts beside.

When she came down she just met Sir Evelyn coming into the hall for his whip. As his eye fell upon her, he thought he had no cause to repent his wish of seeing her on one even of *his* horses.

The well-fitting habit that so well set off the graceful figure, the pretty hat and veil, all were perfect, as he saw at a glance. Mrs. Wilton came almost immediately, and May was introduced to her, and then the groom brought Zephyr up to the door.

"Oh, what a beauty!" exclaimed May, involuntarily. "How lovely she is!" and certainly as Zephyr stood

there, with her coat shining like satin and her glossy neck arched so proudly, she justified any amount of praise. Sir Evelyn mounted May himself, and as he gathered up the reins and put them into her hand, he said low, "My little Arab never had such an honour before, Miss Leslie. I hope you and she will soon become better acquainted."

May laughed brightly as she turned towards Mrs. Wilton while the gentlemen mounted. Evelyn was on his favourite Fire-fly, who curvetted and danced down the drive in most eccentric style, but his rider's well-known voice and hand soon quieted him. The other three were a little in advance. Sir Evelyn soon perceived that May knew what she was about, and sat her horse well, though, truth to tell, she might not have felt quite so safe with anyone else; but he was so perfectly fearless himself, and yet so gentle and careful with her, she could not be afraid. He asked her after the first canter how she liked it, and as she turned towards him with a bright smile to reply, he was struck as he never had been before. This might not be, indeed, the dazzling beauty that attracts all beholders: it was rather that subtle charm of perfect refinement, both of form and feature, that insensibly fascinates; and he thought at that moment that he had seldom if ever seen, among all the high-born damsels with whom he had mingled, any face that could really compare with the one at his side. At last they reached the place of rendezvous. Numerous groups were loitering about, and various carriages setting down their occupants. Of course nothing could be done till Sir Evelyn arrived, so there was a general turning that way as the Alliston cavalcade approached.

"Mamma!" exclaimed Laura Cairne: "just look! Is it possible! Why there is actually Marian Leslie; and on Zephyr, too, that I am never allowed to ride! Did you ever see anything like that?"

"How abominably forward of her," replied Lady Cairne; "and to come with Evelyn in that way. What will people say? If I had only known!"

"Oh, Mrs. Wilton was with them! Evelyn was not likely to forget that sort of thing; but it was so deceitful of her not to tell us: just like her!"

By this time they had dismounted. Evelyn looked out directly for Grace Eversley, as Harry noticed, and introduced May to her. He wanted her to take care of her, as he would have to be away at first, and instinctively did not select his aunt or cousin for the purpose.

Her Ladyship came up almost immediately, her face covered with smiles. "Why Marian, my dear, how glad I am to see you; but so surprised! Why didn't you tell us?" she added, touching her shoulder playfully, and taking unwilling note of the perfect appointments of her dress.

"I did not know myself till the last minute," returned May, joyously: "just as I had to get ready. Wasn't it kind of Sir Evelyn to think of me?"

Lady Cairne was foiled. She saw, as she afterwards expressed it to Laura, that Evelyn had "hedged" himself on all sides. "I only wish Saturday was come," she continued: "it is so absurd of him to make such a fuss with that child, when he knows as well as I do that she has to work for her bread."

A few minutes after Grace found herself at Evelyn's side for a moment.

"There is not a face here to be compared to your little Scotch rosebud," she whispered.

A pleased smile answered her as he replied, "Roses and lilies can afford to admire each other! But I wish there was a little less of the lily about you to-day, Gracie: you don't look quite right somehow."

"Oh, but I *am* all right!" she said lightly, as she turned to speak to some new comers.

The whole party were strolling along now through the beautiful woods, some searching for ferns or flowers, some chatting merrily, and one or two happy pairs totally unmindful of their surroundings. Grace was far ahead, with one or two companions. What would not Harry Wyndham have given to have been walking through those quiet paths by her side! He wondered a little at Sir Evelyn not being with her; but he happened just now to be near May Leslie again: her habit was rather in the way, she needed a little help as they passed through the thick undergrowth. Many a fair cheek would have flushed more brightly and many an eye sparkled, had the young baronet bestowed on others one half the words and looks that fell to her share that day!

"Who is that girl?" asked one and another, as the two walked on all unconscious.

"Some little Scotch relation of Lady Cairne's," was the reply, "who is on her way to London to be a sort of governess somewhere."

"How kind of Sir Evelyn Alliston to notice her so much," was said, with a shrug of the shoulders sufficiently expressive.

At last they reached the spot fixed upon for dinner; a cleared space in the woods, with soft thymy banks

and a little stream running merrily near. The servants deposited the various hampers, and then by mutual consent their attendance was dispensed with. Unpacking was half the fun, as Mabel Eversley remarked, commencing upon an important looking basket. What fun it was, what laughing went on over the spreading of the table cloth and the arrangements of the viands. Willy was very busy, under Evelyn's directions, so was May. The gentlemen were concocting Badminton and sherry-cobbler, champagne was cooling in the brook : in short, nothing was wanting to make that the most luxurious of sylvan festivals. Sir Evelyn again chanced to find himself near to May, and in the midst of all his duties as host contrived to take excellent care of her. After dinner was to come the wishing-well.

"You must let me go with you there, Miss Leslie," Harry Wyndham heard him say: "there is a legend attached to it that I must explain to you."

He thought it would have seemed more natural for Sir Evelyn to have chosen his financée for the occasion, and again he was puzzled.

The party presently dispersed in various directions. Some of the gentlemen were smoking, others busy with their fishing rods ; the ladies with books and sketching. Harry and Evelyn were sitting together enjoying their cigars, when the former suddenly remarked :

"I was rather surprised to hear you ask Miss Leslie just now to go with you to the wishing-well. I thought, of course, it would have been somebody else: but I suppose," he added, with a somewhat forced smile, "that you feel too safe in that quarter to mind."

"Safe ! What do you mean ?" returned Evelyn in astonishment. "Safe from what ?"

"From being misunderstood ; and if *she* is not jealous, and can trust you—"

"Who, and why should anyone be jealous ?" he asked laughing, yet strangely perplexed. "You speak in riddles, Wyndham : I don't understand."

"I only mean what everybody else must think," returned poor Harry, forgetting all Lord Rythsdale's cautions, and going recklessly on : "that as you *are* engaged to Miss Eversley, it does seem rather strange that you should leave her so to herself on a day like this!"

"I!" ejaculated Evelyn. "Who in the world has been putting that into your head. My dear fellow, you never were more mistaken in your life. Grace and I have been like brother and sister all our lives, and shall never be anything more to each other. I thought that report had died a natural death long ago."

A dazzling flash of sunlight seemed to have fallen at Harry's feet, he could not speak for a moment ; and then, as the truth gradually dawned upon Sir Evelyn, he exclaimed,—

"So this is the reason of your strange behaviour to her, is it ? Now I understand it all : how stupid I have been. And it was all for my sake, too, you dear old fellow !" he added, warmly grasping his hand as he spoke. "Why didn't you speak to me, before ?"

"What could I do ?" stammered Harry. "I'm sure I've been miserable enough, and have envied you most wickedly. But oh, have I a chance, do you think ?" and he grew pale in his eagerness. "Dare I venture : it is such a prize to win or lose."

Evelyn smiled, meaningly. "I won't commit myself to an opinion on that point. All I can say is, go in and

try this very day, old boy : there's no time like the present. 'Faint heart never yet,'—you know the rest."

But when it came to this point Harry's courage began to fail. What if all his bright visions should fade : was not even hope better than such an awakening !

"Do you know where Grace is ?" asked Evelyn of Willy, when they returned to the place where they had dined, and found him busy gathering flowers.

"Yes : she went down that little path a few minutes ago ; she said she was going to read, and asked me to bring her sketch book when I had gathered these."

"Were any of the others with her ?"

"No : they went down there after ferns. I was just going to her ;" and he took up the sketch book as he spoke.

"Mr. Wyndham will take that," returned his brother, "and you can stay here with me. Don't go away," he added, as he threw himself down on a grassy bank and resumed his cigar. "Do you hear, Willy ? Mind you don't stir from here till I tell you."

Willy obeyed, but he was rather disconcerted, Evelyn so seldom spoke to him in that tone. He seated himself on the grass, a little way behind him, and began very soberly to sort his flowers. Evelyn, all unconscious, was going over the subject again with great interest. All seemed so plain now,—Harry's reluctance to go to the Priory, his unwonted depression ; Gracie, too, her paleness and lack of her usual spirits ; everything came back to him again, and he wondered he had been blind so long. Presently he threw away the end of his cigar and stretched himself at full length on the turf. In so doing he became aware of Willy's proximity. "Hallo !"

he exclaimed: "Are you there? Come down and sit by me: I've hardly seen you all day."

Willy came accordingly. "Why Evelyn," he said, looking at him rather wistfully, "I thought just now you weren't pleased with me about something."

"What made you think so, my boy?" asked Evelyn, laughing.

"I didn't know why it was; and I asked you something a minute ago, but you didn't answer me."

"I never even heard you. What was it?"

"I wanted to know if I might just run with this pencil to Gracie, it slipped out of her book, and I don't believe she's got another."

"No, no," answered his brother, in an amused tone: "you needn't mind about it; I don't think she'll want it yet. Was I cross?" he added, turning towards him: "I didn't mean to be."

"Oh, you're not now," answered the child, innocently; busy again with his treasures. As Evelyn lay and looked at him, he wished he could be sketched just as he was, then and there, with the sun-light glinting through the trees on his bright hair and his hands full of flowers. When he came to a specially beautiful one he would bend over to show it Evelyn; and once, almost unconsciously, his brother drew him down into his arms, and held him close for a moment, with a vague sort of wish that his childish beauty was a little less ethereal and fair.

Meanwhile Mr. Wyndham had gone down the little woodland path, where Gracie was supposed to have wandered. He saw her presently, sitting under a tree; a book was in her hand; but she was not reading. There was a look of quiet patience, almost sadness on

her face, secure as she now fancied herself from all observation. Harry came nearer; but she did not see him till he was quite close. She started up then rather hastily.

"None of the others are this way, Mr. Wyndham," she said, trying to speak quietly. "Are you looking for any one?"

"Yes: I am,—I was! Oh, Miss Eversley,—Grace! Now that I have found you, let me speak,—only one word," and almost before she was aware, he had taken her hand in his eager clasp, and was pouring out the whole history of his love and hopelessness and despair, and as Gracie listened she felt as if an iron band were slowly unloosing itself from her heart!

The dark eyes were raised to his then, and in that look was an answer better than all words.

"Oh, my darling!" he murmured as he drew her into his arms: "how could I ever have doubted you! But you understand it all now?"

Yes: she understood and knew that her weary, faithful little heart had found its resting place at last! They never thought how the minutes were flying as they stood together there, and the tale that "told in Paradise is ever new," was whispered once more in those leafy shades. But at last they heard the signal that had been agreed upon as a summons to the wishing-well, and slowly turned to follow, just coming up with some of the stragglers of the party in time to avoid being left quite behind. It was a lovely spot. A rough stone wall enclosed the well itself, whose clear, cold waters lay glittering far beneath; but an old oaken bucket and rusty chain that hung across told how they might be reached. The legend was that every maiden who drank

of the water and *wished* at the same time, would have visions in her dreams that night of the future lord of her destiny, provided always that he on the same day, whether known to her or not, tasted the waters too !

Great was the amusement, and many the laughing surmises and secret hopes of the fair damsels, as one after another dipped the little earthen cup into the bucket as it rose dripping from the well ; many the furtive glances to see who among the gallant knights in attendance followed their example. May took her turn with the rest ; but little did she think it likely that any vision would come to her : soon she would be far away, and who among that gay throng would ever think of her again ! She did not see Sir Evelyn, as he laughingly took the cup into his hand ; but several others did, and congratulated themselves accordingly. At last they turned to go back, for the evening was beginning to draw in now. Sir Evelyn chanced to find himself near May Leslie again, and asked her if the wishing-well had answered her expectations.

“ Oh, I think it is beautiful ! ” she replied eagerly. “ Such a wild old place : but it is *all* so beautiful ! ” and there was a fall in her voice. “ I never had such a pleasant time before.”

A reply was on his lips, but at that moment Lady Cairne came up.

“ Evelyn, will you give your arm to Laura, as you seem to have no one to attend to just now ? she has hurt her foot and can hardly walk.”

He turned instantly. Laura said she was in great pain, and did not know how she should get back ; but somehow she did manage it, by leaning pretty heavily on her cousin’s arm, and taking very good care not to lose

sight of him again! When they reached the gate leading out of the wood, an old lady offered Laura a lift in her pony-carriage, which she had ordered to be ready there, as two long fields yet remained to be crossed. Laura could not refuse, much as she might have privately wished that the old lady had kept her obliging offer to herself! The moment Sir Evelyn was released he turned to look for his former companion; but Lady Cairne had been beforehand with him. She had got May safely beside her now, and was enlivening her with a moral lecture on the duties that awaited her, and her hopes that all this pleasure would not make her discontented with her future lot.

“ You know, my dear Marian, it is not as if you could look forward to a continuance of this sort of life, as the others can. Girls in your position, who have to make their own way in the world, had much better accustom themselves to the difference.”

Sir Evelyn noticed an unwonted look of sadness on the sweet face as he passed, but he could not interfere then. At that moment he caught sight of Harry Wyndham and Grace walking a little apart.

“ Hallo, old fellow!” he said low, with a laughing glance at them: “ I shall expect a full confession, remember,” and then went on.

Harry looked radiant. “ It's all his doing,” he exclaimed earnestly. “ How shall I ever repay him?”

Evelyn was looking for Willy. He saw him at last, rather behind, and looking, as he fancied, a little tired and pale.

“ Are you tired, my boy?” he inquired anxiously: “ I'm afraid you've been walking too far.”

“ Only a little; and we are nearly there now, aren't we?”

"There are two long fields yet, and very rough ones: too far for you."

"Oh, but I shall tire you Evelyn!" exclaimed the child, yielding gratefully, however, to the feeling of rest, as he felt himself lifted into his brother's strong arms. "How good you are to me," he added, looking down lovingly into his eyes: "you always seem to know just what I want without my telling you."

"Not very difficult that," returned Evelyn, fondly; "but do you know, I think it will hardly do for you to ride home; it is a long way, and you seem to have had about enough now."

"Oh Evelyn! do you really mean it: why I had been thinking how delightful it would be."

"Well, I won't lay any commands upon you, but I think you had better not; you could go on the box of our carriage, you know, between Barnes and George, if you don't like to go inside."

"I will in a minute, if you wish it: I wouldn't do the least thing you didn't like for the world."

"I do wish it then, my boy, but its only for your own sake. Foster shall lead Snowdrop home, and perhaps Barnes will let you drive a bit if you ask him, only mind you don't upset them: fancy aunt Cairne emerging from a ditch!"

Willy laughed merrily. He did not seem to be laying his momentary disappointment very much to heart.

"How fond Sir Evelyn Alliston seems to be of that little boy," remarked a young bride of the party. "He is his brother, isn't he? Look how he is carrying him across that field."

"Yes:" returned her companion, "he takes great

care of him. I fancy he is rather a delicate child; but Alliston is just the sort of man that all little children and all animals instinctively take to. You should see him among his dogs and his horses too, it is just the same: they all know his voice; he can do anything with the most unmanageable of them."

"I like that sort of thing," was the somewhat arch reply: "those are the men that make home happy."

"That is why you said 'Yes' to me then, of course," laughed her husband. "I really did not give you credit for so much discrimination."

The whole party had now reached the place where all the carriages and saddle horses were waiting, and as they one by one took leave of Sir Evelyn, all declared this to have been one of the pleasantest pic-nics ever concerted. The Alliston carriage drove up last. What would Lady Cairne have given to have had May safe beside her now. She tried to manœuvre for the riders to start first; but Sir Evelyn quietly out-generalled her, and ordered the carriage off. He had hoisted Willy on to the box, and could not help observing as they drove away, how carefully George was holding him, and that even the coachman's solemn gravity had somewhat relaxed. Certainly there was not a servant at Alliston but would do anything for that child. May was mounted first, Zephyr behaving very much as she had done in the morning, but she was not the least afraid now. Very delicious was that ride home through the fresh green lanes, the air heavy with the scent of numberless flowers; the heat had abated by this time, and the long shadows of approaching sunset made everything seem more beautiful. May felt as in a dream of delight: she would not let herself think of the end so soon to come.

Somehow they got into the same order as in the morning; and to two of the party, at least, the end came all too soon. That evening Sir Evelyn and Harry Wyndham had a long talk. All seemed to be promising fairly; the latter had his little patrimony in his own hands now, he was to see the Colonel the next day, and if his consent was gained there seemed no reason for delay. How they laughed together at the game at cross purposes they had been playing so long, and Harry's ingenuity at tormenting himself.

The next day was May's last day at Alliston. Her heart sank as the thought came to her when she awoke; but Sir Evelyn arranged one little matter in consequence, which she fully appreciated. He had to be away himself most of the morning, and he knew she would not be so happy in the house as out in the woods or garden with her childish companion. He did it partly too for Willy's sake. When he came to him with his Latin that morning, something in the look of the little face made him shut the book at once, without even hearing him his usual lesson.

"You may keep that till to-morrow, my boy," he said, drawing him to his side. "I'll write to Mr. Randolph and tell him I'm going to keep you at home. You will like to be with Miss Leslie, as it is her last day, I know."

Willy flushed with joy. "Oh, Evelyn, how kind of you: then we can go to the wood again. How did you come to think of it?"

His brother smiled. "You don't feel any the worse for yesterday, eh? It was rather a long business for you."

"No, indeed: I did enjoy it so much. But I think it was a good thing you didn't let me ride home after all, for sometimes when I ride now it seems as if it took my breath away: I don't know why."

"Does it?" said Evelyn, anxiously. "I mustn't have you ride so far again. Turn to the light and let me have a good look at you." The clear eyes that met his so fully and trustingly, was there anything unusual in their brilliancy? Was the little cheek a trifle less rounded than of yore? Oh, no: Evelyn would not think so! He had done rather too much, perhaps: he must keep him quiet for to day.

"Don't you go beyond the wood, remember. I am afraid I ought not to have let you go yesterday; and yet, how could I leave you behind?"

"Oh, but Evelyn, think what care you took of me, and what a long way you carried me! I don't believe," he added, lovingly, "that any other big grown up man would think half so much of me as you do."

"Ah, but you're my child, you know," he replied, stroking his head, "so of course I take care of you. Why there are,—let me see,—how many years between us: 17—18—19; yes, nineteen years. You're nine now, aren't you? Only think, he added, laughing, how ancient I must be getting."

"But," replied Willy, innocently, "I am sure I never see anybody so tall and strong as you are, Evelyn. It was only yesterday, May was saying"—

But *what* May said, Sir Evelyn was never destined to hear, for at that moment Wilson came in with a message for his master, and the subject dropped.

A very pleasant morning May and Willy spent in the wood. Lady Cairne, knowing that Evelyn was

safely away till two o'clock, did not trouble herself about May, so they were quite undisturbed. In the afternoon she took her with her for a drive. It chanced that evening at dinner that a discussion arose about a remarkably fine Cape jessamine, then in flower in one of the hothouses. It was Sir Evelyn's favourite flower, so it was very carefully tended, and seldom cut by anyone but himself.

"You must come and look at it Miss Leslie," he said. "Do you remember the talk we once had about that and Stephanotus?"

"Yes: and I should like to see it very much. Willy gave me a tiny piece the other day, so deliciously sweet,—but it was some that you had given him," she added, laughing. "He said no one touched it but you."

"I have a most extraordinary weakness for that flower I confess," laughed Sir Evelyn: "but this is the first year it has flowered well, so there is some excuse."

That evening when they were all sauntering as usual about the lawn and gardens, enjoying the only really pleasant time of the day, he asked her to come and look at it. She happened to be standing near the fountain, a little way apart. As they turned to go, however, Laura hurried up, saying she wanted to see the Cape jessamine, and calling one of the Miss Herberts at the same time. An expression of impatient annoyance passed over Sir Evelyn's brow for a moment, but he did not speak. May was not left alone again that evening. When Willy came to wish Evelyn good-night, he said, in a whisper, "Evelyn, I want to ask you something: may I come to you a little earlier with my Latin in the morning, because I want to get some flowers out of my garden for May to take with her? She said

she would come and help me gather them just before breakfast."

Evelyn was silent for a moment. "Suppose Willy that you come to me early, as you say, but instead of going into the garden you write out your exercise for Mr. Randolph, and then you shall come with us to the station, and see the last of Miss Leslie: I will explain to him why I have kept you at home."

"But then I shall not be able to go to the Rectory at all, shall I?"

"No: you need do no more lessons to-morrow; but stay with me: I am going to drive on to Archester. I will see to the flowers."

"Willy was overjoyed. But as Evelyn returned his caress, could he give himself credit for entire disinterestedness! Next morning he went down towards the little piece of ground designated by Willy as "his garden." There were some beautiful roses, but no other very choice flowers. He was just bending over one of the rose trees, when he heard a light footstep coming down the path, and a soft voice calling, "Willy: Willy!" He let her come close before he lifted himself up or spoke: her start of surprise, and the colour that deepened on her cheek were so unmistakably genuine that Sir Evelyn could not help laughing.

"I'm afraid you did not expect me, Miss Leslie, but I am come as Willy's substitute; he is finishing his Latin now, that he may come with us to the station. He promised you some flowers, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did," she replied, rather hesitatingly, with a little secret wonder that *he* should be coming to the station, too; "but I am sorry that you gave yourself this trouble, Sir Evelyn. I only wanted them because

they would be something fresh and sweet in London ; something to remind me of the country," she added, in a tone of unconscious regret.

"I hope the remembrance of Alliston will not die with the flowers though : you must not forget us quite so soon."

"How could I ? No : you have only been too kind to me : it has spoilt me for London and strangers I think. And he saw there were bright tears ready to fall.

"You need not always be there," he replied, rather low, hardly knowing himself how he wished her to take his words. But she answered quite simply.

"No : if ever Mrs. Hamilton can have me back again she will. I shall live in hope, though I'm afraid it is not a very bright one ; but I mean to be very brave," and she tried to smile.

He was gradually leading the way towards the conservatory.

"But the flowers !" she exclaimed suddenly : "we are going away from Willy's garden."

"You shall have some : perhaps my resources are rather larger than his."

They entered the conservatory. How fresh and beautiful it all was. Many and many a time the remembrance of that sunny scented hour came back to May. Sir Evelyn went on cutting one exquisite flower after another, till the bunch in his hand grew a very magnificent one. He opened the door of one of the hothouses, the one where the Cape jessamine grew. Could he be thinking of that ? They stopped before it, and he was just beginning to cut one of the loveliest sprays.

"Oh no, Sir Evelyn !" she exclaimed, touching his

arm in her eagerness; "not that! don't cut that for me."

"Why not?" he asked, smiling down at her as he stayed his hand.

"Oh, you have given me so many beautiful flowers!" she replied, colouring a little beneath his look; "and I know you are particularly fond of that."

"Is that any reason why I should not give it to you?" was the reply, with a slight emphasis on the last word: and he cut off the fragrant branch, and added another to it before they went away.

May was almost breathless when the splendid bouquet was put into her hand. The giver was more than repaid, as her glistening eyes were raised to his; but even he hardly guessed how those flowers would be loved and cherished. As they left the conservatory Willy met them: he had finished his exercise, and Evelyn went at once with him to the study to look it over, so May entered the house alone. As she was slowly going upstairs she encountered Lady Cairne on her way to the breakfast room.

"Marian, where did you get those from? Surely you did not let Willy gather all those for *you*!" (She had heard him say something about her having some flowers to take away.) "How very wrong of you: and that Cape jessamine, too: what will Sir Evelyn say?"

"Sir Evelyn gave them to me himself," replied May, in a low voice. Her ladyship looked as if she had been stung.

"And where is he now, pray?" she inquired sharply. "And where have you been?"

"He is in the study with Willy, I believe." May was saved the last part of her reply, for at that moment

the study door opened, and Evelyn and Willy came out into the hall together.

"Good morning, aunt Cairne," said the former, as she proceeded down stairs. "You will have a hot day for your journey, I am afraid."

Much to the astonishment of everybody, her ladyship had the day before announced her intention of going up to London herself to see Marian safely into the hands of her relatives. She had her private reasons for so doing, some of which may hereafter transpire.

"Miss Leslie," continued Sir Evelyn, "let me send you a box for those flowers; they will fade directly in this heat;" and he dispatched Willy to Mrs. Humphreys for a tin box, in which May tenderly deposited her treasures. Ah, when and where should she take them out, was her involuntary thought as she breathed their rich fragrance, especially the beautiful Cape jessamine, upon which she lavished peculiar care. Then came breakfast. She made an effort to appear as usual, but it was hard work to leave Willy and all the beauties and delights of Alliston: if another feeling was there, too, it was all unconsciously admitted. The carriage came round at last. Evelyn said he was going to drive, much to Lady Cairne's surprise and annoyance, as she knew it was very seldom that he paid departing guests such an attention. All too soon they reached the station: the tickets were taken, the train rushed in; there was a moment's lull; Lady Cairne and her companion were seated, and the "good byes" were being exchanged. Poor little May, her heart was very full; a bright tear, that she in vain struggled to keep back, fell unseen, as she hoped, on Willy's curls, as she kissed him for the last time. And then came the other

parting,—the kind, somewhat lingering clasp of the hand, the few low-spoken words of farewell; but the whistle sounded, the train began to move on, and that pleasant sunny visit to beautiful Alliston was to May Leslie among the things that "had been." Sir Evelyn had got Willy in his arms: he had been holding him up for a last look; but as he turned to go away, the curly head nestled close to him, and he heard something very like a stifled little sob. He fully sympathised with him, perhaps even more than he would have cared to own, though even he could not know the strong peculiar tie that bound that young heart to the friend that had left him.

"Never mind," he whispered fondly: "I quite understand." And then, as Willy raised his head, he asked him if he should like to sit on the box with him, as he was going to drive on to Archester.

He brightened up directly, and was soon seated beside his brother, enjoying his perfect management of his spirited bays. Archester was a quaint old town, with a fine abbey church, almost like a cathedral, and ivy-covered, old-fashioned houses, with high walled gardens here and there. In one of these lived Mr. Lindsay. Sir Evelyn had not seen him since his return from abroad, so he was going to look him up. It so happened that Willy had never been here before.

"We are going to see Mr. Lindsay," said Evelyn, presently. "He lives in such a curious old house, just outside the town."

"Are we? and shall I see him?" The tone conveyed a good deal more than he knew.

"Certainly, unless you like to sit here in the sun," returned his brother, laughing; "besides, there is a

little boy, about your age, I should think: he is a nephew of Mr. Lindsay's, and lives now with him and his mother, because his own parents are dead."

"Oh, how sorry I am for him!" exclaimed Willy, emphatically. "Have you ever seen him, Evelyn?"

"No: never. But Lindsay was talking about him the last time he was at Alliston."

Willy said no more. He had, somehow, a peculiar feeling with regard to Mr. Lindsay: he always instinctively connected him with that one and only time when he had been unhappy with Evelyn, though he little knew how much he had really had to do with it.

"Look: here we are!" said Evelyn, at last, as the carriage stopped before a large red-brick house, partly covered with ivy and creepers. The front door opened upon a flight of wide stone steps, leading into a paved court yard; a small iron gate and railings separated this from the road, and these were flanked on each side by a high wall inclosing the garden. Altogether it looked, notwithstanding the sunshine, a gloomy old place.

"Has Mr. Lindsay returned?" inquired Sir Evelyn, when the servant opened the door.

"Yes, Sir Evelyn: he came back on Wednesday. He will be in from the bank in less than five minutes now, if you will walk in."

Evelyn lifted Willy down, told the coachman to put up for an hour, and then they were ushered into the library. It was a curious panelled room, rather dark, with its two mullioned windows. A large writing table stood in the middle of the floor, plenty of books and papers lying about; but there were no flowers, no pictures, except a dark looking portrait over the mantelpiece; and Willy could not help mentally contrasting it

with Evelyn's bright beautiful study at home, were so many of his own happiest hours were spent. In a few minutes Mr. Lindsay came in, he shook hands warmly with his friend, and then turned to Willy, with no lack of kindness either in voice or manner.

"Perhaps you'd like to come out into the garden," he said to him, "and make acquaintance with my small nephew: he is there I suppose. You'll stay luncheon, Alliston, won't you?" he added, with his hand upon the door.

"Not to-day, thanks. I must go back again, for Grey and Westmore are both with me now, and I have left them all the morning. We don't lunch till two o'clock though, so I shall have nearly an hour to stay with you."

Willy followed Mr. Lindsay into the garden; such a wonderful old place, with oddly shaped flowerbeds and terraces, and one or two very ancient mulberry trees. At the bottom of the lawn was a large pool of water, and beyond the meadows on the other side rose the fine old towers of the Abbey Church.

"Arthur: Arthur!" called Mr. Lindsay. "Come here: where are you?"

A pale, rather timid looking child, came forward hurriedly at this summons; he was apparently about Willy's age, though in reality more than a year older.

"Here," said his uncle: "I've brought you a companion to play with. This is Willy Alliston. You can take him about the garden and show him the doves: he will not be going for nearly an hour. My hopeful nephew, Arthur Fullerton," continued Mr. Lindsay, laughing, as he turned to Willy. "Now I have introduced you formally, so I will go. Mind you don't get into any mischief, Arthur." He went, and soon the

two boys were chatting away in very friendly fashion. Willy had never seen an old-fashioned garden like this before, and looked at everything with great interest. "You live here always, don't you?" he asked, presently.

"Yes: ever since my own mamma died," answered his companion, with filling eyes. "I wish,—oh, how often I wish," he continued, impulsively, "that she could come back to me again."

Willy looked up with ready sympathy: he hardly knew what to say. "But you like being here, don't you: as much as you can, I mean, without her?" He had misgivings on this point that Arthur little guessed.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," he replied, evidently half ashamed of his momentary weakness. "Look: here are the doves."

They were soon busy feeding them, and the time passed pleasantly away. All at once, Arthur exclaimed, hurriedly,—

"Did uncle George say we were to go in in about an hour, or are we to wait till he calls us?"

"I don't remember which he said: but it doesn't signify. You know Evelyn won't go without me."

"Oh, but supposing we were to go in? Do come," he added, earnestly.

Willy turned at once. "Evelyn won't mind a bit, I am sure: he knows where I am."

"Yes: but uncle George might. And oh, I daren't make him angry!" The look that came into his face showed how genuine his anxiety was. At that moment the two gentlemen stepped out of the window into the garden.

"I was just coming to call you," said Sir Evelyn to Willy: it's nearly time we were off. So this is your

new little friend: and how old are you my boy?" he added, touching his cheek kindly with his hand.

"I'm nearly eleven," replied Arthur, timidly; his whole heart bounding at the kind voice and touch; but his eyes dropped, and his colour mounted. Anyone observing him would only have thought he felt shy at speaking to a stranger.

"Oh, then you're older than Willy. And what have you been doing together?"

"Oh, Evelyn," exclaimed Willy, "we have been feeding the doves: do come and look at them." And he took hold of his hand and drew him on. Arthur thought it very wonderful that he should be so completely at his ease with his big brother: how different to himself and Mr. Lindsay! Presently the carriage came round: the two boys parted quite regretfully.

"Will you bring Arthur with you the next time you come to Alliston?" said Sir Evelyn to his friend, as they shook hands. "I shall be so glad to have him."

Willy's eyes sparkled, and Arthur's face grew eager with joy.

"You are very kind to wish it," replied Mr. Lindsay, "but he must learn to behave better before I take him out with me anywhere."

Arthur's countenance fell; but he did not say a word.

"Well, I'll write to you about it at any rate," said Sir Evelyn, thinking it better not to urge the matter then. He lifted Willy to his place, and mounted the box himself, and as Arthur stood wistfully looking after them, he saw the kind look and smile that answered some slight remark of Willy's. As he turned into the gloomy old house again, how in his little heart he envied him his brother's love.

CHAPTER XII.

"A little brook went singing all through the summer hours ;
Ever a soft low murmur it whispered to the flowers.
It said, 'My life is lonely, but it is happy too ;
I gaze for ever upwards on that deep sky of blue.
And anywhere and everywhere, so that I do *His* will,
And do my life's work bravely, I shall be happy still.'"

MEANWHILE May Leslie was speeding on her way to London. When they reached the house Lady Cairne preceded her up the stairs. Oh, how gladly would she have hidden herself anywhere. Mrs. Forrester, a fine stately looking woman, received them with somewhat constrained politeness, but as her eye fell upon Marian it softened instantly. "So this is Eleanor's child," she exclaimed, half to herself. "How like : how very like !" and she kissed her fondly, as she gazed into her smiling eyes: it seemed as if some dream of her youth were passing before her; but she recollects herself, and turned again to Lady Cairne. Two fashionably dressed girls were in the room, whom Mrs. Forrester introduced as her two eldest daughters, and a little common-place conversation followed. At last Lady Cairne said, compassionately, "I think Marian looks as if she had a headache after her journey; perhaps you would let her go to her room, Mrs. Forrester. I shall not be going just yet," she added, as May rose, "so I shall see you again."

"Charlotte, my love," began Mrs. Forrester; but that young lady had vanished. "Oh, Julia! will you take Marian upstairs, then?"

"Which is her room?" was the somewhat ungracious rejoinder.

"The one Miss Saunders had, of course. I thought you knew that!"

Julia led the way up one flight of stairs and then another. "This is it," she said, as she opened the door. "I suppose there was not room for you on our floor. Shall you be able to find your way down again?" she added, as if afraid of being detained.

"Oh, yes, thank you," replied May, longing unspeakably to be alone. But how her heart sank as she looked round. "Is this to be my home always?" she thought; and irrepressible tears rose to her eyes. The unmistakable "stuffiness" of London pervaded the room: the dingy window looked out upon nothing but the roofs of houses and dreary chimneys. An iron bedstead stood in one corner, and a melancholy looking picture of the "finding of Moses" was the sole attempt at ornament the room could boast. Oh, what a contrast to her beautiful room at Alliston, so fresh and bright, with its lofty windows, its luxurious appointments, and constant supply of flowers! She took off her things, smoothed down her hair, and then, before she went down, instinctively she knelt for a minute to implore the help and comfort she so much needed in her new and untried path. When she re-entered the drawing-room Lady Cairne and Mrs. Forrester were alone, busily conversing. Why did a feeling at that moment come over her, that she wished the former had never come with her to London, but had left her to make her own

way among her unknown relatives? Mrs. Forrester soon after left the room. "Well: I shall soon have to leave you, Marian," remarked her ladyship; "my friends will be expecting me. But you certainly have every prospect of happiness here. Mrs. Forrester is a most sensible woman: you may safely trust to her guidance in everything."

May assented. She hardly knew what reply was expected from her.

"I must be going now," continued Lady Cairne, rising from her seat. "Oh, by the way though, I was nearly forgetting one thing. I hope you have not said anything foolish to Willy about writing to him: I thought I heard him saying something about it. It would be most unseemly in your present position; for of course you can easily understand the construction that would be put upon it!"

A flush rose to her cheek as she replied. "Willy asked me to write to him sometimes, and I said I would."

"Of course; very natural; just like a child: but I am quite sure Sir Evelyn would not approve of such nonsense. At any rate," she added, with a sudden resolve, "promise me one thing, for your own sake, Marian,—promise me that you will not be the first to write."

"Certainly, I will not," she replied, with a half smile, knowing well that she would not have long to wait. "He said he would write to me first."

"Very well; then that is a promise," said Lady Cairne, adjusting her shawl with great complacency: "and I know I can trust you. I daresay, my dear, you see no harm at all in it; but you must allow older and

wiser people to judge differently. The mere fact of sending a letter to a child does not always imply that only a child is intended to see it."

The implication was too obvious. May's cheeks were dyed now, and an indignant reply rose to her lips. But at that moment Mrs. Forrester re-entered the room ; and in a few minutes more Lady Cairne had departed. May stood alone in the drawing-room and watched the retreating carriage. "And she will be at Alliston again to-morrow," she thought ; "and they will all be there. I wonder if anyone will miss me ? Perhaps Willy may." Her musings were interrupted by the re-entrance of Mrs. Forrester.

"What an exceedingly kind, pleasant person Lady Cairne is," she remarked. "How grateful you ought to be to her, Marian, for taking such an interest in you, and coming up here with you herself."

"Yes," replied May, feeling just then unable to add more. She went up soon after to change her travelling dress and unpack her things: even that dreary room seemed a sort of refuge. At last she opened her box of flowers: they were almost as fresh and sweet as when gathered that morning at Alliston. As she took them out one by one, and thought of when and how they had been given, and the strange brightness of that happy time, now gone for ever,—was it wonderful that a few very natural-looking dew-drops glistened among their delicate petals ! But she brushed them away, ashamed even to herself to own her feelings. The sprays of Cape jessamine she placed, with one or two other of the choicest flowers, in two little old-fashioned spill cups that adorned the mantelpiece : those were sacred. Some more were arranged in a tumbler and

placed on the dressing-table: but still there were a great many left. It would be rather selfish, she thought, to keep them all; so she went downstairs again and timidly offered them to Mrs. Forrester.

"Oh, what lovely flowers!" she exclaimed. "Where did they come from?"

"I brought them with me," was the rather unsteady reply, "from Alliston: they were only gathered this morning."

"But how can you part with them?" said Mrs. Forrester, as she took the superb bunch into her hand: "I never saw such beauties."

"I've got some more for my own room. Will you let me stay there to-night," she added, wistfully, "instead of coming down again: my head aches so?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Forrester. "I will send you up some tea." She kissed her forehead and wished her good-night; but by no means in the same way as she had at first greeted her. The sweet odour of the Cape jessamine that greeted May the moment she opened her door seemed like a little messenger of comfort. She was thankful to be alone, for "thought is free;" and if her dreams that night were of the bright days so lately departed, who can blame her?

"What do you think of her, Mamma?" inquired Miss Forrester, when they entered the drawing-room after dinner. "Nothing much,—as far as looks go, at any rate," she added, as if trying to re-assure herself on that point.

"I am not so sure of that. Her mother, Eleanor Ross, was a lovely woman, and Marian is very like her. You could not see what she was in her bonnet. But by the way Lady Cairne tells me we shall have to keep a

pretty sharp look-out over her ; she is by no means so quiet as she seems, but quite inclined to be very independent and forward, she says."

"I am not surprised," returned Charlotte, complacently. "Those demure-looking girls are always the worst. I only hope Percival won't begin any of his absurd flirtations with her."

"I shall take good care of that," said her mother. "Richard at any rate is safe."

Richard was the eldest son. He and his brother were in their father's business, and went with him to the city every morning, returning only in time for late dinner. Next to them came the two daughters already mentioned ; a younger boy was at school ; and last of all came Edith, a child of about eleven, who was henceforth to be May's special charge.

When May opened her eyes next morning she could scarcely at first realize where she was. How different those dreary dark roofs and chimneys from the lovely stretches of park and woodland and nearer shrubs and flowers which had lately greeted her awakening ! She was up early ; and as she entered the breakfast-room, with the inward peace that she had sought and obtained in that quiet hour lighting up her young face, Charlotte Forrester was reluctantly obliged to alter her opinion. Edith came in rather shyly, behind her mother. She was a pale rather sharp-featured child, with an abundance of yellow hair, which she wore loosely hanging over her shoulders ; and being the youngest and the so-called pet of the family, was about as spoilt and capricious as such children usually are. Several governesses had left in despair. Her elder sisters looked upon her as a terrible plague, and were thankful for any one to take

the trouble of her off their hands. The child eyed May curiously as her mother introduced them ; but there was no time for many words, as at that moment Mr. Forrester entered the room, and May had to go through the same ceremony with him. He was a fine-looking man, but his countenance was rather stern and business like. He shook hands kindly, however, inquired how she had rested after her journey, and then breakfast commenced. The young men did not appear, they were always late on Sunday morning, so May saw nothing of them. Edith and she walked to a church at the end of the square, the others drove to a fashionable one at some distance.

"I am to call you 'Marian,' mamma says," remarked that young lady, when they had gone a few steps. "I am so glad."

"So am I, dear," returned May, gently. "I don't like being called 'Miss Leslie.'"

The child looked up with some surprise ; she had evidently expected some resentment of her privilege.

As May sat in the dingy London pew, how her thoughts wandered off to last Sunday, and the sunny little church at Alliston, where doors and windows were open all service time, and she had watched the sun shining through the leaves and over the bright green turf outside. The walk home, too, on the dusty pavement was rather different to that shady shrubbery path that led out at last into the beautiful gardens. She remembered, too, how she had sat with Willy under the lime tree, and how about ten minutes before dressing time somebody else had joined them. How he had insisted on giving her the two exquisite roses he had in his hand, to wear that evening. (Those withered roses were in being

still !) What a dream it all seemed now ! She could hardly bring herself to listen to Edith's talk and questions. No one went to church in the afternoon ; so **May** had a long quiet time to herself, which she enjoyed greatly. About five o'clock Edith came to her room.

"Would you like to go to church again this evening, Marian, or dine with the others : mamma sent me to ask you ?"

"Oh, go to church," she replied : "I don't the least care about dinner."

"Then I'll go with you," exclaimed Edith, joyfully ; "and we'll have some tea in the school-room now."

This arrangement suited **May** admirably. When they returned the others were all out, and she retired to rest very thankful for her quiet Sunday.

"What a blessing it is that Edith seems to take so to Marian," observed Julia to her sister that night : "only think how she would have plagued us to-day."

"Yes : I only hope it will last !" was the pleasing rejoinder.

The next day Mrs. Forrester initiated **May** into her new duties. It seemed hard work to begin, unaccustomed as she had been to anything like restraint in all her life before ; but she knew that her altered lot was the result of no mere chance or accident, it had been ordered for her. This was the one place in the whole world she was now called upon to fill ; and bravely she resolved, though in strength beyond her own, to fill it faithfully and well. Mrs. Forrester gave her the choice of dining late with them if she liked, for she intended to do her duty and consider her as one of the family ; but **May** sadly felt the constraint, almost coldness of her

present manner to her,—so different from the warmth of that first greeting: instinctively she felt, though she did not know, that something had come between them since then. She earnestly declared her preference for early hours with Edith, and Mrs. Forrester consented with great willingness: the impression produced by Lady Cairne's words could not be effaced, she always felt more or less uneasy when her sons were at home. May, of course, came into the drawing-room after dinner; Mrs. Forrester made the necessary introductions, and then, apparently without design, kept her by her side during the rest of the evening. Mr. Richard Forrester was usually so occupied with the contemplation of his own perfections that he had little time to bestow on anyone else. Percival, on the contrary, was a free-and-easy warm-hearted fellow, always captivated by a pretty face, and most chivalrous in his devotion to the "softer sex." He was evidently struck by the appearance of his young cousin, and bestowed a look of very unequivocal admiration upon her as they shook hands; it was entirely lost on May, however, though it was keenly observed both by Mrs. Forrester and her daughter Charlotte.

It was strange after that how many errands Percival found to the school-room, sometimes in the morning, but oftener in the evening, when he came back, which was generally about six, the school-room tea-hour: he seemed to have acquired an astonishing taste for early tea just now! He would often bring bon-bons or other trifles for Edith, or ask if he could execute any commission for either. Percival had always been her favourite brother, but she thought he had grown very kind and thoughtful lately! May was perfectly uncon-

time: she did not know that these were
habits. She had not the very slightest
suspicion that of mere cousinly regard.
her much more pleasantly than
sisters vouchsafed to do; but
truly to his good nature and
Edith and she led a very
so take to her entirely;
gaily she strove to
draw her young footsteps
Sometimes she talked to
never tired of hearing about
not know where nor how lately
him. She delighted, too, in long
she would improvise about her own childish
the old manse in Perthshire; it seemed a sort
pleasure to talk of these things even to a child.
strangely enough Edith never showed any of her airs
and tempers to May; she was so gentle, so quiet, so
child-like herself, that it was impossible to behave
badly to her. If ever she was at all wilful and tiresome
May would say in her simple way, "Well, Edith dear,
we must wait till you feel right again: I can't contend
with you, you know," and Edith would throw her arms
round her in a burst of penitential sorrow, and promise
she would never vex her again. Meanwhile Mr.
Percival Forrester was beginning to discover that these
visits to the school-room had become a source of very
peculiar interest and pleasure to him; admiration
gradually changed into a deeper feeling, and almost
before he knew it he was desperately in love with his
pretty cousin. He was too well aware of the espionage
of the drawing-room to pay her more than the most

casual attentions there; but Mrs. Forrester was not to be deceived: a word or two that Edith had occasionally let fall about Percival's frequent visits to the school-room, put her on the alert; and she came in unexpectedly one day and found him there. It is true that Edith was sitting on his knee laughing and playing with him, and May looked up from making tea with a perfectly unembarrassed air: but this was quite enough. She said nothing at the time, but after awhile sent for May, and when she had got her alone poured out a perfect volley of anger and upbraiding. Lady Cairne's warning she now understood too well, she said; her confidence in her had been misplaced, she could not have believed her capable of such conduct, etc., etc. Poor little May! she stood utterly bewildered, she could not at first understand what she was accused of, but when it dawned upon her, indignation for a moment kept her silent. She saw it all now, she remembered that private conversation that Lady Cairne had contrived to have with Mrs. Forrester; this, then, accounted for the cold suspicious manner of the latter that had so often pained and surprised her. In a few quiet, dignified words she utterly denied the charge, but tears were struggling hard to come, and soon as she escaped to her own room they burst forth uncontrollably. "Oh, what have I done," she exclaimed to herself, "that I should be treated so! How could Lady Cairne be so unjust, so cruel!" It was a long time before she could recover herself; but at length she found comfort in casting all her trouble on the one Friend who never wearies, never tires, and never fails His children; and then she was calm again. Her thoughts then naturally went back to Alliston and all the kindness she had received there.

She almost wished she had never been ; the contrast of her present life was so strong : and the next moment felt that she would not be without those treasured memories for a thousand worlds ! How she went over each day, —that sunny afternoon by the trout stream, —the pic-nic to Oakdale wood, and especially the ride home afterwards ; and that last morning when she had watched the gathering of her flowers : oh, how it all came back to her, with a strange sweet mingling of joy and sorrow ! Sadly she wondered why she had never had one letter from Willy : she would not, could not think, he had so soon forgotten her. Perhaps, as Lady Cairne had suggested, his brother had prevented it ; and how could she expect Sir Evelyn Alliston to remember her among his constant succession of visitors, and in the midst of all he had to do and think of. He had been *very* kind to her : that thought she held fast, —but only as a little stranger guest and Willy's friend.

May would not have wondered at Willy's silence could she have transported herself to the hall table at Alliston, a few days after her departure. A number of Sir Evelyn's letters were lying there ready for the post, and among them one addressed to herself, in Willy's childish hand. Lady Cairne, turning them over (accidentally perhaps) perceived this : she looked round, and seeing no one near, quietly slipped it into her pocket, and went on upstairs. Evelyn and Willy were out riding, and would not be in again till after post time. Her Ladyship proceeded to her own room, lighted a taper, and watched it slowly consume. "There," she said to herself, as she brushed the ashes under the grate : "that's the best place for *that* ! I've no notion of letting such nonsense go on if I can prevent it." It might have been ten

days after this that Willy remarked one morning, "Isn't it odd, Evelyn, that I have never heard from May! I wrote her such a long letter while I was with you in the study the other day. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, there's nothing wonderful in that!" interrupted Lady Cairne. "I expect she has quite forgotten us all now. She is in a house full of young cousins, who all make a great fuss with her; and in London there is always something going on. I don't suppose she has either time or inclination to write now."

"I don't think she would forget me, though," replied Willy.

"Nor do I," remarked his brother, quietly. "You must write again, sometime, little man: possibly your letter may have missed."

Willy did write again: his second letter shared the same fate! No wonder May watched and waited and grieved at the long, long silence. She was bound by her promise not to write first; besides, after the idea that Lady Cairne had suggested, she felt it would be impossible. Sorrowfully she at last concluded that she was forgotten, though sometimes she could hardly help trying to believe differently. When Willy's last letter remained unanswered, Sir Evelyn himself began to think there must be some truth in Lady Cairne's remark, hard as it was to understand it; but he did not say any more to him about writing again.

About this time Mr. Percival Forrester perceived a sudden change in May's demeanour. His own entrance into the school-room was invariably the signal for her leaving it. She always made some slight excuse; but never stayed more than a minute when he appeared.

His mother had been a great deal too wise to mention the subject to him, well knowing that opposition would but increase the zest of his foolish fancy, as she termed it; but he felt pretty certain that some unseen hand had been at work. He was growing desperate; he watched his opportunity; and one evening, when they were all at the Opera, he returned home rather earlier than usual from dining with a friend. Mrs. Forrester would not have gone herself, had she not believed that he was safely disposed of. The school-room door was ajar. May was singing to herself, for Edith had been gone to bed some time. She seemed to be pouring out her very soul in the plaintive music of that sweet song. Percival had never heard anything like this before. He came in softly; but May turned with a startled look: she had fancied herself quite secure and alone then.

"I never heard you sing so before, Marian," he said, "Won't you sing for me again?"

"Not now," she replied, somewhat hurriedly: "I was just going." And she went to take up her candle.

"Nay, not in such a hurry as that!" he said, quietly detaining her. "Stay a minute with me. I never see you now, and I must say a word to you."

"You can see me in the drawing-room to-morrow evening," she replied, trying to speak indifferently. "Surely your news will keep till then."

"No, no!" he exclaimed, earnestly, placing himself so as to prevent her going. "You shall hear me. Don't you know!—Is it possible you have not seen! Oh, Marian, I love you: I love you as my very life! I cannot bear this suspense any longer: it maddens me!"

May stood for a moment absolutely still.

"You have indeed taken me by surprise," she said at length. "But it is impossible. I can never be to you more than I am now. This is all I have to say. Please let me go now."

"But why? why!" he exclaimed, passionately. "Is it that you are afraid of *them*? I will take care of that. I don't care what any of them say. You, and you only, can make me happy."

"It is not that,—though I know well enough what would be said: but that is not the reason. I can never give you the love you ask for. Never!" she added, almost sadly, as she saw the look that came over his face.

"And is *that* your decision?" he asked, bitterly. "Is that all? Oh, Marian, and I have loved you so!"

"It is. I cannot help it. I feel the honour you have done me, and I shall never forget all your kindness to me since I have been here; but it would be cruel to trifle with you. You would not wish me to promise what I could not give."

He felt the full truth and bitterness of her words, and was silent a moment.

"Try and forget me," she said, with an attempted smile, as she laid her hand upon the door. "You will soon find some one who will make you far happier than I could ever have done."

"Forget you!" he ejaculated, grasping her hand as in a vice. "Never: never! You are too good for me, Marian, I know that. But oh, if you would only let me!"—

"I will not let you say any more," was the gentle reply. "Good night; and don't let us ever talk of

this again," she added, earnestly. And then she was gone.

Percival stood where she had left him: his brain seemed in a whirl. Was it possible that all his hopes were dashed for ever. It was a terrible blow; and yet through it all he could not attach one thought of blame to her. No: the refusal of his love had been softened as much as possible by the honesty, the womanly tenderness, with which it had been given. He should always love her; and for her sake as well as his own he would respect her wishes, and be silent on the subject,—for the present at least; for he could not yet give up all hope. He passed a sleepless night, and pleaded headache next morning when his pale looks were commented upon. He and May met apparently as usual, though she instinctively avoided meeting his eye. After this he rarely entered the school-room; for Percival Forrester had far too much right and gentlemanlike feeling to trouble her with unwelcome attentions. Whenever they did meet, though, she knew well enough that she was not forgotten.

"Percy hardly ever comes to the school-room now," said Edith one day, discontentedly. "He does not bring me half so many nice things as he used to do."

"And a very good thing too," replied her mother. "Sweets are very bad for little girls."

She said no more, but took an opportunity of speaking to May.

"I am glad, Marian, to find that your own good sense has made you attend to what I spoke to you of the other day (she knew well enough that May herself must have discouraged her son's attentions, or he would not have discontinued them thus). You must be perfectly

aware that a young man in his position could only be amusing himself with you. You could not suppose he could ever think seriously of such a thing, eh ?" she continued, tapping May's shoulder as she spoke.

May answered not a word. What a reply she could have given,—a reply that would have rather astonished Mrs. Forrester: but for his sake she was silent. All went on now much as usual. Her life was very quiet, even monotonous: sometimes she felt weary, and longed for sympathy and companionship. She seldom went out: now and then they took her to a concert; but for the most part, as the others were out a great deal, she and Edith had quiet evenings together. She grew really fond of the child, and Edith never seemed so happy as when with her. When there was company at home she always appeared, of course. Her cousins affected to consider her quite beneath their notice; but occasionally they were forced to acknowledge that "that quiet little Marian" had powers of conversation when she chose to exert them, that held entranced many of their cleverest guests, in spite of all their efforts to allure them away. But May went on in her quiet round of daily duties; Mrs. Forrester and her daughters being too sensible of her value in so entirely taking Edith off their hands to dream of parting with her, whatever, for other reasons, they might have wished. Poor child: longings would sometimes come over her, and memories of other days. If she could only see Willy once again! and almost unconsciously with that wish came another. Well: no one had ever treated her exactly in that way before or since, with such a mixture of graceful kindness and elder-brother-like care. It was not very wonderful if now and then unbidden

tears would come with the thought that they had all forgotten her. Very earnestly, meanwhile, she prayed, and strove to let her little light shine brightly and to do her duties faithfully and well ; and if as time went on the smile came less often than of yore, and the sweet face wore a more settled look of quiet patience, her brow was always unruffled, and her heart had the sunshine of true peace within.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CONTRAST.

“ Speak gently ever to a child, and check the harsh reply
That sends the crimson to the cheek, the tear-drop to the eye.

“ ‘Tis sad to see life’s evening go down in sorrow’s shroud ;
But sadder still when morning dawn is shadowed by the cloud.

“ Deal gently with the little ones : be pitiful ; and He,
The kind good Father of us all, will gently deal with thee ! ”

SIR EVELYN had, according to his promise, written to Mr. Lindsay, asking him to bring Arthur the next time he came to Alliston ; but the latter still demurred. He came once or twice alone, till at last, when he had a somewhat longer “ leave of absence ” than usual, he wrote and said that if his friend really wished it he would bring him with him the following Wednesday. Willy was delighted, so was Arthur, if his looks meant anything when he arrived, and the shy joy with which he returned Sir Evelyn’s kind welcome.

“ It is very good of you, Alliston,” remarked Mr. Lindsay, as the two boys went off together ; “ but you don’t know what a troublesome child he is ! ”

“ I should hardly have thought that, from his looks,” replied Evelyn.

“ Ah, looks go for nothing : you would soon alter your opinion if you had much to do with him, I assure you ! ”

All, however, went on smoothly. Arthur was quite happy when alone with Willy ; in Mr. Lindsay's presence he was quiet and constrained, to a degree : he was evidently in great awe of him. One evening while Sir Evelyn and his guest were out riding, Arthur and Willy were at play together, when the former threw his ball and inadvertently broke a window. His terror when he saw what he had done was quite pitiable.

"Oh, what shall I do ?" he exclaimed. "It can't be mended before uncle George comes back ; and he will be so dreadfully angry : he says I am always so careless. Oh, Willy, Willy, pray don't tell of me !"

Willy was almost as much distressed as Arthur : too well he guessed what cause he had for his fear.

"Of course I won't," he said. "But do tell Evelyn yourself : I'm sure he will not be angry when he knows it was an accident."

"Oh, but if I do, uncle George will know too ! No : I daren't ! I daren't !" he repeated, in the extremity of his fear.

Willy hardly knew what to do. But at last, by dint of very earnest persuasion, and going himself to look in, when Sir Evelyn returned, to see that he was alone in the library, he got him to come to him.

"You will be so much happier," he urged. "And only think if it was found out in any other way !"

Arthur was trembling and sobbing so, that at first Sir Evelyn could hardly make out what was the matter ; but his patient, gentle way of hearing him gradually gave him courage. He was just in the midst of explaining how it had happened, when the library door opened and Mr. Lindsay walked in. Sir Evelyn never forgot the child's look at that moment : what a tale it

told! "Hallo, Arthur!" he exclaimed: "what's all this about? You've been in some mischief again, I'll answer for it. What have you been doing, sir?" and he laid an imperative hand on the boy's shoulder. Arthur struggled in vain for words.

"He has had an accident, that is all," said Sir Evelyn, anxious to make as light of it as possible; "and he had just come to tell me about it himself."

"And what was that, pray?" asked Mr. Lindsay, in no very re-assuring tone. "Something careless, as usual, I've no doubt. Tell me at once," he said, speaking again to Arthur.

"I—I—broke a window," sobbed the child; "but indeed—"

"No buts for me," he returned, angrily: "I will hear no excuses. It's just what I expected: just of a piece with your general behaviour; and you know what I said last time. I'll make you remember this," he added, taking hold of his arm and moving towards the door.

"Oh, Evelyn! Evelyn: do speak for him!" cried Willy, bursting into tears. "He didn't mean to do it: indeed he didn't."

"Lindsay, stay one moment," said Sir Evelyn, quickly. "Let me have one word with you."

He came back a step at that; sternly dismissing Arthur to his room, however.

"It is no use though, Alliston: that boy gets worse and worse every day; but I am determined to break him, somehow," and there came a look into his eyes that made Willy shudder. His brother signed to him to go.

"But I really think this time, Lindsay, that he is not

so much to blame. The ball struck against something he did not see; besides, surely it never answers to be too severe with children: it only frightens them into being deceitful, you know."

"Oh, that's all very well in theory; but if you had such a boy as that to deal with, you would soon find the difference! He was a regular untamed cub when he first came: his mother had spoiled him utterly, and he cared for no one."

"You can't say that now, at any rate," said Evelyn, with a slight smile; recalling the child's look at his entrance, and hoping thus to soften him a little.

"No: I was determined to make him mind by some means or other. But you've no idea of the trouble I've had with him: even now I can't trust him a yard off; he is always getting into some mischief, and then he tells lies to screen himself. By Jove, if he tries that on again!" and his eye flashed: "but I think I have given him one lesson on that subject that he won't soon forget!"

He paused: Sir Evelyn was silent.

"Well," he said at length, "all I can say is that I believe lads may be driven to lying by mere actual fear. I don't mean, of course, that confession is always to preclude punishment; that plan I have not at all followed with Willy, and yet he tells me everything; but I think we ought to estimate the effort it is to a child, and be as merciful as possible."

Mr. Lindsay would not be convinced, however; it was only at last, when begged as a personal favour to Sir Evelyn himself, that his consent was gained to pass the matter over this time.

"You shall have this as a reward," laughed the

latter, giving him a newspaper that had just arrived. "There's the end of that trial in it, I see, that we were so interested about yesterday."

"What the Melford one?" he inquired eagerly. "Don't you want it though?"

"No: you shall have it first." And Mr. Lindsay sat down, and was soon as deeply absorbed in his newspaper as if Arthur and his affairs had passed out of his head entirely. Somebody else had not, however, forgotten him.

"I suppose I may send Arthur into the school-room now?" said Sir Evelyn presently, as he was leaving the room. "Willy will be waiting tea for him I expect."

"What? Oh, I had forgotten where he was. Yes, I suppose so, if you don't mind the trouble," said Mr. Lindsay, returning again to his paper. Glad even of this ungracious permission, without which he would not have felt himself justified in going to Arthur, Sir Evelyn went upstairs. He knew what the poor child must have been suffering all this time, but felt sure that if he had spoken sooner it would have been in vain. He found him in such a state of fear as was sad to see, it told so much. When he heard a footstep along the passage, he, of course, thought of no one but Mr. Lindsay, and covering his face with his hands, awaited in shrinking terror what was to come next. Instead of the angry words he expected, a gentle hand was laid upon his head, and a kind voice spoke his name. He looked up then through his tears, and there was Sir Evelyn bending over him, seeming as he thought at that moment like one of the beautiful guardian angels he had sometimes seen in pictures. He put his arm round him and drew him out of his corner.

"Come: you need not be so afraid now, my boy. Your uncle has promised me to say no more about this now: so look up," he added kindly, "and let me see you smile again."

"Oh, Sir Evelyn, I never can thank you!" exclaimed the child, clasping his arm with both hands, and looking up at him with a face of grateful reverence. "I know it's all your doing;" and he sobbed again in the very fulness of his relief. Sir Evelyn was greatly touched.

"Poor child!" was all he said; but after a pause, he added: "Now, dry your tears, and come into the school-room to tea. Willy will be waiting for you."

"Where is *he*?" asked Arthur, fearfully; indicating sufficiently by the tone who he meant.

"In the library, reading," said Sir Evelyn, with a smile. "Come along." Willy looked up with great anxiety as they entered the school-room: he did not know how it had all ended.

"It's all right, Willy," said his brother. "Mr. Lindsay has forgiven him this time; so now the sooner you begin the better. It is getting late for you."

Willy's face shortened at once: he had been in almost as much trouble as Arthur himself. Evelyn left them enjoying their supper. Arthur had even begun to laugh again. He had good reason to be satisfied with the result of his kind interest in the orphan child, but little he guessed how closely he had bound that young heart to himself for ever. He and Mr. Lindsay were dining out that evening, so they did not see the boys again. Next morning, when Willy was as usual sitting on his brother's knee after he had finished his Latin, he suddenly exclaimed:—

"Oh, Evelyn! if you were like Mr. Lindsay, what should I do?" and he laid down his head on his shoulder in a way that was very expressive.

"I suppose you are thinking of yesterday?" returned Evelyn, fondly. "But you see he did let him off after all."

"Yes: but only because you asked him. I really do think, Evelyn, he is often frightened into doing things. The other day he said he was carrying something, and Mr. Lindsay spoke sharply to him, and he dropped it and broke it: and then, oh, he was so angry. Why when I had that accident with the tumbler at lunch on Sunday you weren't angry with me."

"No: because I saw that it was not your fault. But I am afraid Arthur is sometimes inclined to be deceitful, and keep back what he ought to tell."

"Ah: because he daren't. Mr. Lindsay is so different to you. Oh, how he does talk of you, Evelyn! He says he should always be good and happy if he could always be with you."

Evelyn smiled and shook his head.

"Poor child! I'm afraid he is mistaken there. But I have been thinking of one thing, Willy. Suppose, as you have holidays just now, I ask Mr. Lindsay to leave him with us till he comes again. Do you think he would like it, and should you?"

Willy was delighted, and Arthur overjoyed at the very idea. Sir Evelyn mentioned it to his friend, and after considerable demur and many fears that he would be spoiled, which the former laughingly assured him he would take care should not be realized, he consented. No one could help being struck with the change that seemed to take place in Arthur when Mr. Lindsay was

was a relief, a happy childish joyousness, contrasted touchingly with his colour in his presence. He really . with rather sad, dark eyes, as if into the shadows of life ; but with and freshness and confiding love, and been fostered and rightly trained, in-nipped and blighted as they were now by the under which his young life was passing. s devotion to Sir Evelyn was something almost ic, though he was a great deal too shy to show half of what he felt : a word or a smile from him as treasured in a way he little suspected. The gratitude he had felt that day for rescuing him from his uncle's anger had deepened into love and reverence of no ordinary kind ; he might have done anything with him, the poor little heart warmed so to the least touch of kindness. Sir Evelyn's impartial justice, too, in weighing what was actually wrong with what was mere inadvertence or accident, his judicious encouragement of openness and frankness at any cost, and his ready sympathy with childish interests and pleasures,— all would have worked wonders on the sensitive lad, whose naturally reserved temperament required peculiarly careful management. But what could be done in a week ? Though even in that short time some change was discernible. On Saturday afternoon, the day that Mr. Lindsay was expected back, it happened that Sir Evelyn was sitting in the veranda with the two boys ; he had been mending a kite for Willy, and the latter had run in to put it safely away ; he chanced then to make some slight remark about "next week," when to his surprise poor Arthur, whose heart had been very

full several times at the prospect of leaving, suddenly burst into tears. "Oh, Sir Evelyn, don't talk about next week: where shall I be then!"

"Why, Arthur," he said, kindly drawing him to his side, "I did not know you had been thinking of that, my poor child. Don't cry," he added, as he felt the deep sobs so close to him.

"Oh, I can't help it! You've been so very very kind to me: I never was so happy in all my life before."

Evelyn tried to soothe him, promising to get leave for him to come again before long. Poor little Arthur, it was the first time for many a day that he had felt loving arms round him, and listened to such kind words; he quite clung to Sir Evelyn as he murmured, "Oh, if I had only anybody to love me as you love Willy; I could do anything then: but no one really loves me now."

"You mustn't say that, my boy," said Evelyn, deeply touched. "They love you at home, and Willy loves you dearly, and I—"

"You!" interrupted the child eagerly. "Oh, you don't mean that! no, you can't," he added sadly.

"I do though, indeed; and I should like above all things to see you good and happy, and trying to make everyone else love you too." At that moment a step was heard, and Mr. Lindsay stepped out of the open library window. His astonishment was great at what he saw.

"What!" he exclaimed, as Arthur looked up hurriedly, and betrayed unmistakable signs of recent tears: "in a scrape again!"

"Oh, no," replied Sir Evelyn, as he rose and shook

hands with his friend: "anything but that." And he looked re-assuringly at Arthur, for he had felt his start at his uncle's sudden re-appearance. The child tried to smile; but no words would come.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mr. Lindsay, raising the downcast face with his hand, and speaking rather more gently than usual, possibly touched a little by something he saw there.

"What *was* the matter with him just now?" he asked presently, as he and his friend strolled out into the garden together.

"Oh, he had been fretting a little about leaving Willy, and at this being almost his last day here. Really though, Lindsay, he has been as good and tractable as possible. I hope you will let him come again sometimes in this way."

"Ah, 'new brooms sweep clean!'" was the somewhat sarcastic reply. "I only hope he will let me see some of his goodness. You are very kind to wish to be bothered with him. If he behaves well I will bring him, certainly."

How glad would Sir Evelyn have been at that moment to give him a word or two of advice; but he had on a former occasion ventured as far as he dared: he could only hope that his friend would some time see for himself what he had vainly tried to impress upon him.

Truth to tell, the latter had been more struck by what he had just seen than he cared to own. Never had Arthur been in his arms like that, seeming to cling to him so confidingly; but then, as he said to himself, "Alliston *has* such a way with children: everyone else can't be expected to be like him." Ah, if Mr.

Lindsay had but followed up these thoughts he would have been saved many an hour of keen and bitter self-reproach! It was not that he was not in a sort of way fond of the child. At times he would treat him with kindness, even gentleness, and Arthur's little heart would expand like a flower in the sun; but then for some slight offence would come harsh words and angry frowns, and often, for want of patient inquiry, unjustly severe punishment; for Mr. Lindsay's idea of his duty was to "break his spirit: to *make him good*," as he called it; little thinking that he was stifling all that was natural and lovely in the boy's young heart, and actually instilling into him lessons of deceit and cowardice! But he needed a deeper lesson than he had had yet.

It happened a week or two after Arthur's visit to Alliston, that he was playing in the garden one afternoon with a little spaniel puppy belonging to his uncle, and teaching it to fetch and carry. The pool at the bottom of the lawn was very deep, and beyond a certain point on the bank he had been forbidden to go. "Fido," however, darted away, and run frantically down towards the water after a bird, Arthur, forgetting that he was as safe there as on the land, rushed after him, in an agony of fear lest he should be drowned. In so doing he missed his footing and fell in: not over head, fortunately, for it was not deep just there, and he managed to scramble out again by himself, Fido barking round as if he thought it capital play. Of course he got wet through. But Mr. Lindsay was writing in the library,—there was no way to the house but by passing that window,—and he knew well enough what would be the consequence if he saw him. He would never believe, or, indeed, stay to hear his excuse:

it was disobedience to positive orders, and he would visit it accordingly. So he stayed about in the garden till his clothes were literally dried upon him, hoping that no one would find him out. The consequences may easily be foreseen. That evening he was alternately shivering and very hot, and his head ached so that he could hardly hold it up, when he was in the drawing-room after dinner with his grandmother and uncle.

Old Mrs. Lindsay was quite an invalid, and lived entirely in her own rooms, only coming down to dinner in the evening. She noticed nothing; but Mr. Lindsay thought he looked tired, and sent him to bed rather earlier than usual. An hour or two afterwards, the elderly servant,—“Nurse,” as she was always called who attended upon Mrs. Lindsay,—informed her master that she thought Arthur seemed very poorly. When she came from her mistress’ room, she opened his door as usual to see that he was all right; but found that he had not been to sleep at all, and that he felt hot and feverish. Mr. Lindsay went upstairs at once, and soon saw for himself that it was no fancy: he was evidently very unwell.

“What is it, Arthur?” he said, speaking kindly enough now, as he laid his hand on the burning forehead.

“Oh, it’s nothing! I shall soon be all right again, uncle George. Don’t mind about it.”

“When did you first feel so? Can’t you tell at all how it began?”

But it was in vain. Arthur was far too much afraid of him to venture on the real truth.

“I shall soon be better,” was all he said; and that was all that could be got out of him. Mr. Lindsay was

uneasy, however, and sent for the doctor who lived close by. He came directly, and examined and questioned him, but was still as far from arriving at the truth as his uncle had been.

"I cannot help thinking," he said, as he came down-stairs, "that that child has had a shock or a fright of some kind. I tried him in all ways, but could get nothing out of him."

Did his hearer's conscience give him a twinge at that moment? If the poor child had got into trouble, was it likely that he would have confessed it?

"I'll try him once more," he said to Dr. Irvine. "Just wait one moment." He went back into the room. "Arthur," he said, gently, "will you try and answer me one question? Have you had any accident of any kind to-day that you're afraid to tell me of? because you needn't be the least afraid now. I promise that I won't be angry with you, whatever it is: eh?" he continued, seeing the look that came into the child's eyes at these words. "Try and think."

But the effect of months of stern and often unjustly harsh treatment could not so soon be done away. Arthur moved uneasily.

"Oh, no, no: I have nothing to tell!" he murmured.

All solicitations were useless, and Mr. Lindsay returned to the doctor unsuccessful as ever.

"I will send some medicine for him at once," said the latter, "and be sure to let me know directly if he seems to get worse."

He went, and Mr. Lindsay returned to Arthur's room. He was strangely uneasy, and could not make up his mind to leave him. Nurse was there too. The child was tossing restlessly about, but presently he seemed

ing sleep. Suddenly he

"He will be so

dent he

, those two

I hid his face

at he is saying,"
had better send for

petrified. Too well he
could. But he hastened

When Dr. Irvine returned

s. They put ice on the burn-

to quiet him; but the child's

cries and moanings were sad to

: so cold! Please take me out; but
No, no!" and again the little voice
the laboured breathing was all that was

said Dr. Irvine, in a low voice. "You may
upon it something has happened to him. He
t into the water, perhaps; but then surely you
I have known of that."

A suspicion of the possible truth flashed across Mr. Lindsay at that moment. What if Arthur had been driven to conceal such a thing as that through positive fear of his own harshness. The idea was a terrible one. Oh, if he should die! He could not speak, but stood gazing at him with the deepest anxiety. Arthur opened

his eyes, and as they fell upon him again, such a look of terror passed over his face, and he cried out so piteously, that Dr. Irvine exclaimed :—

“ He evidently does not know you just now, Mr. Lindsay : you had better keep out of his sight for a little while. Sometimes in delirium they take these unaccountable fancies, you know.”

“ Was it unaccountable ? ” was the bitter thought that came over him as he moved away. How it went to his heart to hear him. Every now and then would come the name of “ Sir Evelyn,” in entreating tones.

“ Oh, come to me ! ” he murmured. “ You saved me once. Won’t he listen now ? ” and again a shuddering cry broke from him.

The other two supposed that he was merely wandering in unconscious delirium. What did that third watcher feel ?

“ Who is this Sir Evelyn that he keeps calling for ? ” asked the doctor, at last. “ I am almost a stranger yet in these parts, you know, and yet I fancy I have heard the name.”

“ Very likely : it’s Sir Evelyn Alliston. He lives at that large place, Alliston Park, about seven miles from here, on the Overstone road.”

“ Ah : I remember now ! Well, it really is a pity he should not see him. In a case like this it is of the greatest importance to find any one who can soothe and quiet him. Would it be possible to send for him ? ”

“ Certainly ! He would come at once, I am sure.”

Mr. Lindsay left the room presently to write the note, that it might go the first thing in the morning ; but softly as he re-entered it, the child seemed to recognise

even his step, and again recurred the same fear and agitation. He saw there was no help for it: he must keep out of his sight.

For many hours there was no change. Dr. Irvine looked anxious, he never left him. They were constantly changing the wet cloths on his head, but still he wandered on. Now calling out in fear, now earnestly entreating some one; Sir Evelyn's name ever on his lips in longing tones. The night wore away, and in the morning the doctor was obliged to leave for a short time; but he came backwards and forwards as often as he could. Mr. Lindsay hovered restlessly about, in a state of mind not easily to be described.

It was not till nearly eight o'clock in the evening that Sir Evelyn arrived. He had just ridden off for the day on business when the messenger came; but when he returned, and had read Mr. Lindsay's note, he delayed not a moment,—not waiting for dinner, and leaving only a hurried message for Willy. He was struck by his friend's look as he entered the house.

“Is it very serious?” he inquired, anxiously; but he perceived that for the moment he could not answer.

“Oh, that isn't the worst!” he exclaimed, at last. “It's my fault: all my doing, Alliston! Oh, if I had only taken your advice long ago!” and then by degrees Sir Evelyn learned the whole truth.

He tried to cheer him; but his heart ached for the proud unbending man, who he knew must indeed have passed through a terrible ordeal before he would have made such an admission. After a time they went upstairs together. Dr. Irvine was in the room, and Mr. Lindsay made the necessary introduction. The former

rose instantly. He was evidently struck with the appearance and manner of the new comer, and did not wonder at Arthur's longing for him.

"He is a little quieter just now," he said, in a low voice. "Will you take my place, and then he will see you when he opens his eyes again. He has been calling for you incessantly."

"Poor little fellow!" said Sir Evelyn, as he seated himself beside the bed. "I wonder what I have ever done to make him think so of me."

Just then Arthur moved uneasily, and he heard for himself the restless wanderings of evident anxiety and fear. He took his hand.

"Arthur," he said, gently.

At the sound of that voice the child opened his eyes. He looked at him intently for a moment. Something like a half-smile passed over his face as his little fingers closed over his, and then he seemed to doze off once more.

"That's right," said Dr. Irvine. "He certainly seemed to know you then."

But presently he started up again, and gazed wildly at Sir Evelyn.

"Oh, tell him I didn't mean to go! Don't let him get me!" and he threw himself into his arms and clung to him convulsively.

No need to ask for explanations now. Sir Evelyn understood all as well as Mr. Lindsay himself.

"Hush! hush, my poor child!" he said, in soothing tones. "No one shall hurt you: you are quite safe now." And gradually he succeeded in quieting him; but at his slightest movement the child would open his eyes as if he feared he was going to leave him. Sometimes he

murmured something about Alliston ; then he would speak of Willy. By degrees he became more tranquil, and at last he seemed actually to sleep.

"He really is asleep now, I believe," said the doctor. "Now all depends on his being kept perfectly quiet and undisturbed."

"Is the danger past ?" then inquired Mr. Lindsay, in earnest anxiety.

"That remains to be seen. No one can tell that till he wakes again, when some change is sure to take place. If he should wake soon, send for me at once ; if not, I will come again in an hour or two. What will you do, Sir Evelyn ?" he added, with a half smile, as he saw how fast his hand was held in that little clasp. "I am afraid it would be a risk if you attempted to leave him yet."

"I would not move on any account," he replied, low. "I shall do perfectly well."

"You must have something, though," returned Dr. Irvine ; "for you may not be released for a long time yet. Mr. Lindsay, will you come down with me and order it : the fewer in the room the better now ; and, besides, you really must take something too," seeing how pale and wretchedly ill he looked himself.

Mechanically he obeyed him ; but oh, how he longed to remain ! What would he have given to be sitting as his friend was now ! But sadly he felt that he was worse than of no use,—in fact, that it was of the last importance that he should not be there when the child woke again. Dr. Irvine made him take some wine ; and he swallowed a morsel of food ; but he could not eat. He persuaded him then to remain quietly downstairs, for the present, till some change came, for he had perceived (though he

carefully avoided hinting at it) that his presence had a disquieting effect upon the child. He need not have been so cautious: Mr. Lindsay was only too bitterly conscious of it himself. He left him trying to rest on the sofa, for he had been up the whole of the night before, and himself went back to Arthur's room, taking some sandwiches and wine for Sir Evelyn. These the latter managed to take with one hand without moving. The two then exchanged a silent look of thankfulness over the little one, sleeping so quietly now, and the doctor noiselessly withdrew, leaving Sir Evelyn alone to his vigil! Hour after hour passed, and still Arthur slept. The night was waning: the old Abbey clock had just tolled the quarter-past five when he opened his eyes. For the first time a sweet conscious smile played over his features, as he evidently recognised the face bending over him. "You are really there," he whispered: "I thought I had dreamed it. But where am I? and what have I been doing?"

"You have had a nice long sleep," said Sir Evelyn, gently; "and now here is something nice for you." Dr. Irvine had ordered some light nourishment to be ready for him directly he awoke.

"You here, too, nurse," he murmured, as she came to his side, and tenderly raised him up while Sir Evelyn held the spoon to his lips. He took a little, and then once more looked wistfully up at him. "You won't go will you?" he asked. Being reassured on that point, the heavy eyes closed, and he seemed to drop off to sleep once more. Nurse slipped quietly down to tell Mr. Lindsay. "Thank God!" he ejaculated, so earnestly, that as she went away she said to herself, "Well, I never thought master was so fond of that child before!"

If he was his own he could not seem more glad-like." About eight o'clock Dr. Irvine returned. Arthur was just awake again.

"Nothing could be better," he said in a low voice to Sir Evelyn, as he laid his hand on the child's forehead. "Humanly speaking you have saved his life. But you must go and get some rest now. I will stay here."

Sir Evelyn rose. "I shall come back again," he said, smiling, in answer to an anxious look from Arthur's eyes: "I'm only going into another room for a while."

Dr. Irvine sat down beside his little patient, and himself administered his food and medicine, for he had made nurse go and rest too; and after a while he saw with satisfaction that sleep again held him. Sir Evelyn went downstairs for a minute, for he knew how anxious Mr. Lindsay would be to hear all. He listened eagerly. "Has he mentioned me at all?" he exclaimed at last.

"Why, no: not yet," was the reply, with quick sympathy at the question, which he did not let appear. "You see he must be kept from talking as much as possible. Dr. Irvine hoped he would sleep again."

"I never can thank you, Alliston," he returned, brokenly. "Oh, if he is spared how differently I shall treat him, poor child! But I must not keep you, you are looking quite done up."

He showed him to his room, and for some hours Evelyn rested, though it cannot be said that he slept much. He was eagerly welcomed when he went back to Arthur's room.

"I shall leave him in good hands," said the doctor as he rose, having several other patients to attend to, and amused to see the way in which Sir Evelyn's hand was imprisoned the moment he sat down again.

"Oh, Arthur and I are old friends you know," he answered, smiling; and then when he was gone he amused him by talking in a low tone of Alliston and his various pets there,—the pony he used to ride, Willy's rabbits, and a certain little puppy that he promised to give him for his own some time. All this was just what he wanted, it amused without exciting him; and at intervals he slept again.

"You will certainly have to take out your diploma, Sir Evelyn," said Dr. Irvine, when he returned in the evening: "your treatment has been perfect; you have just done what was needed, and not *overdone* it, which is the great thing. I should say you must have had some experience in this sort of thing before."

"A little," he replied in an amused tone. "I must show you *my* boy some day,—my little brother: I have learnt something about children through him."

"Ah, I thought as much; I thought you knew what you were about from the first moment you came!"

Arthur went to sleep that night with Sir Evelyn beside him; he seemed so much happier when he was near that he would not hear of being banished yet. During the whole day he had never once mentioned his uncle's name.

Sir Evelyn had written a note to Willy in the morning, which he sent by a messenger. The reply was characteristic: "I do miss you very much, my own dear Evelyn; but don't leave poor Arthur for me, I know what it is to have you when I am ill. Please

give my best love to him. I think of him in my prayers every day, and I hope God will let him get well again: but I shall watch for you all day to-morrow. Your own loving Willy."

The next day Arthur was so much better that Dr. Irvine spoke of having him downstairs soon; and Sir Evelyn decided to return, but not till the afternoon. It was about eleven in the morning when Arthur, who had been lying very still, suddenly exclaimed, "Where is uncle George? I haven't seen him yet, have I? Does he know I've been in bed so long?"

"Yes," replied Sir Evelyn with a feeling of great relief, for he had not dared to approach the subject himself, much as he wished the two to meet before he left. "Yes, he has been so anxious about you, and so glad to hear you are better."

"Why doesn't he come and see me? Will he, do you think?"

"I am sure he will, directly: shall I go and ask him?"

"No. Stay," said the child, with something of the former anxious look: "are you sure, quite sure, that he won't say anything; because I remember now,—I remember what I did, and—"

"You needn't be the least afraid, my boy: I will answer for that."

"Will you?" and he looked up at Sir Evelyn as if to re-assure himself. "Then will you ask him to come? But you won't go away: I shall see you again?"

"Certainly: I am not going till the afternoon," and with another kind smile he left him.

How Mr. Lindsay longed, yet feared to go, when Sir Evelyn gave him the message. He dreaded lest it

should bring on any fresh excitement: but at that minute Dr. Irvine came in.

"Go, by all means," he said. "I will call again: it won't do him any harm as he has asked for you."

"But what must I do about letting him talk? Alliston says he seems to have remembered what happened that day, and to be thinking about it."

"Oh, if it seems any relief to him, let him tell you; it will be rather a good thing for him than not."

He went up at once; but the child had hardly yet got over the sort of instinctive dread that his presence had caused during his illness, and a half timid look came over him again as he entered the room. He came up to the side of the little bed. "Well," he said, as quietly as he could, "so you really are better?" and he stooped down and kissed him.

The words were not much, but something in the tone made Arthur look up quickly; he saw the eyes that were bent on him were glistening, and for the first time in his life he threw his arms round Mr. Lindsay and returned his caress eagerly. How the strong man thrilled at that childish embrace, words could not tell. "Oh, uncle George," he exclaimed, with starting tears, "I did not know you would care so much for me!"

"God only knows how I have cared," said Mr. Lindsay, "and how thankful I am now. But let me have a good look at you," he continued, recovering himself, and taking the little face between his hands.

"Oh, I'm glad, so glad now, that you came!" murmured the child. "I think I was afraid that you would be angry when—when—"

"Angry, my boy! How could you think of such a thing?"

"Yes, I mean when I told you how it all happened; for I remember it now, uncle George. I fell into the water that day, for I thought Fido would be drowned, and I ran after him and my foot slipped, and then I daren't come in because—because—I had to pass the library window, you know," and he hid his face on his shoulder as he spoke. Mr. Lindsay understood and was silent.

"Well," he said at last, "you must never be so afraid again, my poor little lad. I know I have given you too good cause for it; I don't mind owning that now; but you must forget all that, and see if you can begin to love and trust me a little: eh?" He added, gently, "Will you try?"

Arthur looked up earnestly. "Oh, if you will let me! I have often felt as if I loved you so much, and then somehow I used to get frightened again."

Mr. Lindsay could hardly wonder at that; but then he turned his thoughts away to something else, and tried to amuse him, and was all the time so very kind and gentle that Arthur was soon quite at ease with him. He was obliged to go at last, for he had been three days absent from the Bank, and his presence was absolutely needed there; but he left Arthur greatly relieved, and looking almost himself again.

Sir Evelyn came after a while to wish him good-bye. "I shall soon come back, though," he said kindly, seeing how full his heart was at the thought of losing him, "and I will bring Willy to see you as soon as Dr. Irvine will let me."

The parting was very tender and sad: Sir Evelyn

had been so much to him lately. His tears fell fast after he had left, but he tried to comfort himself with the thought that he should soon see him again.

When Mr. Lindsay returned at the end of another two hours, he brightened up at once. He held him on his knee for a long time that evening, while his room was being made comfortable, and himself gave him some of the beautiful fruit that Sir Evelyn had sent for him from Alliston. Arthur felt as if he were in a dream ; he could hardly realize, as he lay in that kind clasp, that this was his once dreaded uncle George, in whose hands he had so often trembled to find himself !

Mr. Lindsay gradually became so necessary to the poor child's comfort, that the times when he was at home were now his happiest in the day. He grew stronger by degrees ; and there was a kind of relief about him,—even joyousness that had never been observable before. Dr. Irvine still saw him constantly, and was more than satisfied with the progress he made. One day, as he was sitting beside him, wheels were heard stopping at the gate. The doctor looked out.

"Oh, what a beautiful child !" he exclaimed, involuntarily. "Who is he ?"

"That is Sir Evelyn Alliston's little brother," said Mr. Lindsay, as he came to the window : "he said he would bring him to see Arthur."

Sir Evelyn himself was at the door, so he was not visible ; a servant at the horses' heads ; Willy was standing up in the carriage : he had rather more colour than usual to-day. And as he bent forward with slightly parted lips to catch what was being said

about Arthur, he certainly did justify the doctor's remark.

"At any rate," observed the latter, "the old saying about 'angles' and angels holds good still: he only looks a little too angel-like, I fear."

Mr. Lindsay went down, and in a few minutes brought up his guests. Sir Evelyn and the doctor shook hands warmly: they seemed to have a strong bond of interest now. Arthur and Willy were absorbed with each other immediately. Dr. Irvine did not go, however: he seemed strangely fascinated by Willy's looks. Ah, perhaps his thoughts had wandered to far-off days, and to a fair-haired child of his own, over whose little grave in the sunny South the orange trees had long been waving! There was a yearning look in his eye that struck Sir Evelyn.

"Come here, Willy," he said, "and speak to Dr. Irvine. This is my little brother that I told you of," he added, as he drew him near.

Willy approached in his own pretty, half-shy way. But as the doctor's hand rested for a moment on his head, and he gazed into the sweet face with his practised eye, why did that yearning look deepen almost into one of pain?

"Take care of him, Sir Evelyn," was all he said, somewhat hastily, and then hurried abruptly from the room.

"He lost his only child some years ago," remarked Mr. Lindsay. "That is why they say he takes such a special interest in children."

"Is it so?" said Evelyn, thoughtfully. He added no more, but the remembrance of that look troubled him.

Before they left he made Mr. Lindsay promise to bring or send Arthur to Alliston as soon as permission

could be obtained. Next day he was allowed to come down stairs, and soon began to feel and look quite himself again. He was not to go to school again at present, but in all other respects he gradually assumed his usual habits. And yet how changed everything was. He no longer stayed out in the garden or up in his own room, because he was afraid or did not care to go in. Business kept Mr. Lindsay away a great part of every day, but his return home was now welcomed by Arthur in a way that often touched him exceedingly. He tried as much as possible to interest himself in his little pleasures and pursuits, though it did not come naturally to him at first. He was not like Sir Evelyn, whose fine nature instinctively delighted in the graceful fancies and unsophisticated words and ways of childhood,—he was cast in a sterner mould: but the effort in time brought its own reward, and in the love and simple confidence of the little child he found strange pleasure. One day, as soon as he came in, he called him down into the study. Arthur obeyed with alacrity the summons which in old days would have filled him with alarm.

“Look here,” he said, showing him a note that had just arrived. “What do you say?”

It was from Sir Evelyn, asking him to bring or send Arthur over the next day, to stay as long as he would spare him. Arthur's eyes sparkled.

“Oh, how nice!” he exclaimed. “You will go, uncle George, won't you?”

“I am afraid it is impossible for me to get away to-morrow; but I shall send you, at any rate.”

“Not till you can come too,” he answered, looking up at him with half-shy earnestness. “Let me wait till you go.”

He little knew how those words and that look went to the heart of his hearer.

"No, no," he said, kindly, with a caressing touch of his hand: "I must not. The change will do you more good than anything, and I shall come without fail on Saturday."

With this decision Arthur was obliged to be satisfied. He went the next day, and was received with the greatest kindness, as may be supposed. Every day he seemed to get stronger,—appetite returned; and before Mr. Lindsay returned the next Saturday, a very marked improvement was perceptible. On that afternoon Sir Evelyn was sitting out on the lawn under the trees, busy with his newspaper, the two boys were with him amusing themselves, when Arthur looking up, exclaimed:—

"There is uncle George!" and instantly ran off to meet him.

He was some way off then; but Evelyn could not help seeing the difference of this greeting from one he remembered not long before, almost on the same spot. He noticed Mr. Lindsay's pleased look as the child came up to him, and the loving embrace that followed. They came on together, Arthur's hand in his, and talking to him all the time.

"Well," said Sir Evelyn, as he welcomed his friend: "what do you think of him? I don't think Alliston has disagreed with him."

"I never saw such an improvement," replied Mr. Lindsay, looking down on the bright little face. "I am sure Arthur and I have both cause to be grateful to you for ever! Ah," he continued, when they were alone, "I didn't believe you before, Alliston; but I

have found out for myself now that gentleness and kindness are much more powerful than severity. I can do anything with that child now, anything in the world : but I wish I had learned the lesson sooner !"

That visit to Alliston did Arthur good in all respects. His intercourse with Willy was not without its effects, for the fragrance of that little flower could not but diffuse itself ; and he went back to his home, not only with health fully restored, but with other thoughts and motives than he had ever known before.

CHAPTER XIV.

“A child’s smile : nothing more ! Quiet, and soft, and seldom seen ;
Like summer lightning o’er, leaving the little face again serene.
I think, oh, child beloved, thine angel, who did smile to see how
near
Unto thy gentle spirit now the pearly gates of heaven appear,
On this pale cheek has thrown the brightness of his countenance,
and made
A peace most like his own,—a beauty that we look on half afraid !
Nay : fear not ! as to thee is given on earth such sheltering care,
still watching o’er,
Thine angel up in heaven beholds thy Father’s face for evermore.”

IT seemed as if an unusual grace and tenderness hung around Willy now. He was cheerful and bright as ever, and yet there was a change. Certainly he appeared to lack some of his former strength. After even a comparatively short walk he would sometimes fail utterly, and gladly yield himself to the strong loving help always at his side. He liked best to sit under the lime tree, with his books: if he could get Evelyn there too he was perfectly happy. As the weather grew colder he was more with him in the study: quiet as a mouse, but quite content as long as he was near. How often in the midst of his letters and business would Evelyn’s hand pass caressingly over the golden head so close beside him, with a word or a look that would bring the colour to his cheek and the loving light to his eye; and often his pen would be laid down while he explained to

him something he could not understand in his reading, or taking the pencil or chisel himself, he would show him how to surmount his difficulties. Truly his tender love and gentleness towards him could not be surpassed! Was it possible that now and then a foreshadowing crossed Sir Evelyn's soul, that he almost seemed to realize at times by how frail a tenure he held his little treasure? He tried to banish such thoughts; but who shall tell how often they forced themselves upon him!

One Sunday afternoon, towards the end of October, he chanced to go into the library for some book he wanted. He threw himself down on an easy chair that stood invitingly near the window; but having read a little he threw his book aside, and sat dreamingly looking out upon the fair scene before him. The first part of the month had been cold and wet, but now the sky was without a cloud. It was one of those still sunny October days, when nature seems hushed in profound repose: when the leaves in their last gorgeous dress are motionless upon the trees, and summer seems lingering, loth to depart. His thoughts were not as tranquil as the day: a vague sort of disquiet was upon him, he could hardly have told why. Presently he saw Willy coming up from the shrubbery path, his little old Bible in his hand, and his face sweet in its gentle peacefulness.

"Willy," he called, as he came nearer. He started, for he did not know that Evelyn was there. "Come here," said his brother: "where have you been all this time?" He came in through the open window, and as the soft hazy light gave a sort of ethereal beauty to his slight form and fair childish features, Evelyn was forcibly reminded of his dream of long ago. The child looked up almost wonderingly, as with strange tender-

ness he clasped him close as he lifted him on to his knee. "Where have you been all the afternoon, eh?"

Willy looked down at the book he held, and then rather doubtfully at his brother.

"I've been in the shrubbery, reading, till I thought I ought to come in. Did you want me?"

"No: not particularly. But what can you find to amuse you so much in this?" and he took the little Bible from his hand.

"Oh, it doesn't *amuse* me exactly," he said, innocently: "it is better than that. It tells me all about heaven, and Jesus, and the angels, and so many beautiful things besides."

"But do you understand it all, Willy? It always seems to me that there are a great many hard things in the Bible."

"Yes: because it is God's book you see, not man's: so there must be some things we can't understand. But all we want most is so easy and plain, even a little child like me can understand it; and then you know Jesus says—" He stopped: wasn't he going on too far?

"What?" asked Evelyn, kindly. "You must not be afraid now, you know."

"Why, He says, 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes;' and I believe that means those that are willing to learn as little children."

Evelyn thought he had not far to go just then for an exemplification of those words: they had come very near to him. It was this very childlike spirit and unquestioning faith, to which so much is promised, that he knew he lacked yet; he almost envied the happy confidence of the little one in his arms. He was silent

a minute, and then he said, "So you really say it makes you happy to read this: eh? You wouldn't like me to take it away from you then, and give you some nice amusing book in exchange,—something that would do you good and make you laugh?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Willy, in alarm, looking up at him anxiously. "You don't really mean it: please don't, Evelyn. Take away anything else you like, but not my dear little Bible. I don't believe I should ever like another half so well."

"I won't, then," he said, smiling; "but why have you such a special love for this one? it is not particularly handsome outside at any rate."

"It belonged to aunt Effie," was the somewhat wistful reply; "and it is full of her marks: look, here are some," he added, turning over the leaves, "and there are some more. They are such a help to me when I am reading: they seem to remind me so of what she used to say."

"And I suppose she taught you about all these things?" he asked, half regretfully. "Well, I won't say I wish she had not, exactly; but you are too young to think about them, my boy, they are enough to make you quite dull and sad."

"I don't think I am dull," he answered, with a smile; "and indeed I am not sad. I am very happy now,—happier than I ever was before: for I know," he added, lower, "that Jesus loves me, and will let me go to Him some day; and then I thank Him every day for giving you to me, Evelyn. I used to think when she was gone there would be no one to love me: but now,—oh, what should I do without you!" As Evelyn stooped down and kissed the sweet lips, Willy clung to him and whispered, "Oh, Evelyn, if I could only know that

you were happy in loving the Lord Jesus too, I think I should have nothing else left to wish for; I should be happy then to go and wait for you in heaven!"

No words were possible: Evelyn only clasped him closer as he felt how unspeakably precious to him was the frail little form he held.

Willy raised his head presently; but when he saw the look on his brother's face, he exclaimed, earnestly,

"But you mustn't be unhappy about me: indeed, you mustn't, Evelyn. Sometimes it does me good to talk about these things, and I've no one else to talk to, you know."

"Ah, but how can I bear it! I cannot,—I cannot! And you *say* that you are well. What makes you talk of being in heaven so much, my little boy?"

"I can hardly tell," he murmured. "It seems to come to me in my dreams: I fancy the angels are near me often, and I think I see the beautiful new Jerusalem, and the harps and the crowns;" and Willy's eyes grew bright as if then he could almost see the far-off gates of the golden city and hear the angels' song: but then he laid his head down again on Evelyn's breast, and nestled close in the loving arms that held him, as if he felt how very tender and strong still was the tie that bound him to earth.

Evelyn sat silent for a long time; his face resting lightly on his shining hair: but oh, what bitter rebellious thoughts were surging through his heart! It could not be. No: it could not be,—that this child, this little one, who had, as it were, become part of his very self, was to be taken from him! The idea was terrible: he would not yield to it. But the words that Mr. Randolph had once said came over him again, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

CHAPTER XV.

“The time I’ve lost in wooing,—
In watching and pursuing
The light that lies in woman’s eyes,
Has been my heart’s undoing !”

“OH, Marian!” exclaimed Edith, dancing into the school-room one afternoon, “Mamma says that as they are all going out we may have a holiday and do as we like: what shall we do ?”

“I really have not a choice, dear,” replied May with a smile, as she looked up from her drawing: “do you care to go anywhere ?”

“No, not a bit: I’d much rather stay here and draw too; and then you will tell me a story, won’t you ?” she added, putting her arm round May, and stooping to look at her drawing.

“Oh, what a pretty old church; and what a curious porch !” It was a little rough sketch of Alliston church, from which she was now trying to take a more perfect one.

“I saw it once,” she answered, quietly: “but it is some time ago now.” A sigh involuntarily escaped her as she remembered how many months had passed since then. So the two spent a very cozy afternoon together; the others were all gone to a grand concert

at Sydenham: Mrs. Forrester, her two elder daughters, Richard, and a Mr. Montague,—concerning whom a word must here be said. He was an intimate friend of the family, in fact, almost like one of them; and Mrs. Forrester secretly cherished the hope that he might, ere long, become so in reality. She had long had an eye to him for Charlotte; for though he was nearly fifteen years her senior, he was wealthy, gentlemanlike, and altogether exactly what she should have chosen for her: and by the young lady in question he was regarded almost as an accepted suitor. She flattered herself that all was now surely tending to the one object of her ambition: viz., to become eventually "Mrs. Lucius Montague." Possibly his ideas on this subject might have been different.

May was just in the midst of telling Edith one of her childish adventures in Scotland, when there came a ring at the hall door bell; a few moments after the school-room door was thrown wide open with the announcement, "Mr. Montague." She almost started from her chair, so great was her surprise; and Edith exclaimed, "Why, Mr. Montague, I thought you had gone with them to Sydenham!"

"I had thought of it," he replied; "but was prevented. Look, I saw this the other day, and as I happened to know of a certain young lady's penchant for sweets, I ventured to bring it for her." He presented her, as he spoke, with the most elegant case of French bon-bons that Edith had ever seen. She was delighted; and while she was examining it, utterly lost to everything else, Mr. Montague turned towards May Leslie.

"Shall I be forgiven if I ask your acceptance of a very trifle, too?" he said, softly. "I once heard you

express a wish for this :" and he put a splendidly bound edition of "Tennyson" into her hand.

" This for me !" she exclaimed, in utter astonishment. " Oh, no, Mr. Montague ; I could not think of accepting it, indeed ! "

" Why not ? " he asked, with a pleased little smile, that May did not see, at her rising colour.

" It is a great deal too handsome for the school-room," she replied, trying to speak indifferently, as she half tendered it back to him. " You must leave it in the drawing-room, please : it will be much more appropriate there."

" Unfortunately it is your's past recall," he replied, as he turned quietly to the title-page. There undoubtedly was her name, the date, and the initials of the giver.

She looked almost troubled. " I don't know what to do," she said, simply. " I don't wish to keep this, Mr. Montague ; and yet you have put it out of my power to refuse it. I can only say I am very much obliged to you : but I—I wish you had not done it."

He was quite satisfied : he had not expected more, so he only smiled down at her and said nothing. For a few minutes they conversed on different subjects, Edith joining in gaily, and then he left.

" How very kind of him," she remarked, as the door closed. " Look, Marian, isn't this lovely ? and oh, what a beauty of a book ! Has he given you that ? Won't they be surprised at our presents when they come back ? "

May was uncomfortably conscious of this, and fervently wished her book safely back again in the hands of the giver. And yet, what could she have done ? By

refusing it utterly she would have made too important an affair of it; besides, he had given Edith something too: why should she mind?

"We have had a visitor to-day," said Edith, mysteriously, when she came down to dessert that evening. "Look, mamma, what he gave me."

"Who was it?" said Mrs. Forrester, taking the beautiful case into her hands. "Why, child, this could not have cost less than a guinea! Was it uncle John?"

"No, indeed," retorted Edith, drawing herself up: "somebody a great deal nicer than Uncle John. He gave Marian a present too."

When at last she condescended to explain, Julia exclaimed, "Mr. Montague! Why, he said he could not come with us because he had some business to attend to!"

Charlotte did not speak.

"Oh, he did not come till nearly five o'clock!" said Edith; "and he did not stay many minutes then."

"I must speak to Marian," remarked Mrs. Forrester, noticing the cloud on her eldest daughter's brow. "I cannot have gentlemen admitted into the school-room when I am away. I wonder she allowed it."

"She did not, mamma," said Edith, eagerly. "She could not help it: he came straight in while we were drawing. I am sure she was as much surprised as I was."

"It must not happen again," was all her mother's reply.

When May came into the drawing-room that evening she brought the book with her, for she would not seem to think there was anything to conceal in the matter.

She showed it at once to Julia, who generally treated her a little more amiably than her sister vouchsafed to do.

"Mr. Montague brought this to-day," she said, simply. "I told him it was much more suitable for the drawing-room than the school-room."

"It is a splendid book, indeed!" replied Julia. "I think you are a very lucky girl, Marian: one seldom sees such a binding as this."

At that moment Mrs. Forrester approached, and May had to undergo a long lecture on the extreme impropriety of her conduct; though she earnestly denied having had an idea of being invaded in the school-room, —almost reiterating Edith's very words. But Mrs. Forrester would not be convinced. As to Charlotte, nothing could exceed her vexation and annoyance. She had been extremely put out at Mr. Montague's non-appearance that day; and that he should have noticed Marian in this way galled her beyond endurance. She certainly was not less spiteful and unkind to her after this. Meanwhile Mr. Montague played his own game: he never seemed to pay special attention to any one. But the occasional looks that May encountered, the tone of his voice when addressing her, and the nameless signs by which such love as his shows itself, by degrees began to make her feel uncomfortable. Oh, why did people trouble themselves about her! She would be so happy if she might go on in her own quiet way; living, ah perhaps too much, in the memories of the past,—feeling how strangely distasteful to her had become the ordinary run of men, and "love making." Why was this? That was a question she never dared ask herself, but the feeling was there notwithstanding.

One day Mrs. Forrester was sitting alone, when a letter was put into her hands, the handwriting of which she immediately recognised. It was from Mr. Montague; and her thoughts at once went to Charlotte. This must be what she had so often longed for, though lately she had been a little doubtful as to how matters stood between them. The letter began with warm expressions of gratitude for all the kindness he had received from the whole family; and now he was about to confide to her a hope, that a yet nearer and dearer tie might ere long unite him with them. Mrs. Forrester's eye sparkled: she turned over the page and read a few lines farther. Suddenly her cheek paled: she almost gasped. It must be a mistake: she could not have read rightly. But no: there were the fatal words, cruelly distinct. "And now let me entreat your permission to urge my suit with one, whom but to see is to love. Your fair young cousin, Miss Leslie, has captivated my heart irretrievably, she has entirely subjugated me. I know what a priceless treasure I am asking at your hands; but believe me, if I am considered worthy, it shall be the one object of my life to secure her happiness. If she will intrust it to my keeping, never, if I can help it, shall she know an anxiety or care. I think I need not state that my means are ample,—that I shall be able to surround her with all the comforts and luxuries she ought to enjoy. If you, dear Mrs. Forrester, will aid me in obtaining this,—the dearest wish of my heart,—you will win the undying gratitude of your anxiously expectant,

"LUCIUS MONTAGUE."

Poor Mrs. Forrester! She sat for some moments

perfectly stunned. Was this, then, the end of all her hopes, of all her plans ?

“ False deceitful girl ! ” she said, half-aloud, as she thought of May : “ to pretend indifference, and yet lead him on to this point ! A man of his age, too, to dream of a child like her,—barely nineteen. If she had been five or six-and-twenty now, there might have been some sense in it.”

Charlotte, it may be remarked, had just attained that desirable age.

At that moment she heard her husband return ; and hastening to his study, she poured out her tale with such volubility that it almost took his breath away.

“ It is absurd,—preposterous ! ” she exclaimed. “ It shall never be. I will never give my consent to it. She is a mere child still. Mr. Montague ought to have known better than to think of such a thing.”

“ My dear,” returned Mr. Forrester, in his quiet business-like way. “ I think you have changed your opinions very suddenly. It was only the other day you were expressing a wish that James Sinclair would take a fancy to Marian. It would be such a good thing for her to have a home and such a position.”

“ Well, yes, I did,” she replied, rather crestfallen. “ But he is a very different man to Mr. Montague.”

“ And yet he is his senior by several years.”

“ Oh, Richard, you don’t understand ! Of course I should not have minded that ; but it would have been quite another thing. You know,” she continued, hurriedly, “ we have thought for a long time that he cared for Charlotte ; and now to have that little insignificant girl come between them in this way,—oh, it is too provoking ! What will poor Lotty say ? ”

"My dear Margaret," returned her husband, quietly; "this is a matter on which we cannot have a word to say. Montague has a perfect right to please himself. I am sorry though if Charlotte has allowed herself to become attached to him without good reason."

"She hasn't, she hasn't!" returned Mrs. Forrester, excitedly. "He gave her good cause to suppose he cared for her; but of course she was no match for Marian, with her artful forward ways. Lady Cairne might well warn me about her."

"Nay: there I think you are unjust. For never since she has been in our house have I ever noticed the slightest impropriety in her manner; and as to withholding our consent, we have no right whatever to do it. An honourable straightforward man has made her an honourable proposal, and she is quite old enough, ay, and wise enough too, to know whether she will be consulting her own happiness by accepting him."

"Accepting!" echoed Mrs. Forrester. "What girl in her senses would ever dream of refusing him? a man in his position, too! I only wish she had never entered our house. And what will Edith do without her, I should like to know!"

"That again, my dear, is a question not to be considered for a moment. Sorry as we must be to part with her, Marian must at once be told what has happened. You know perfectly well that if this offer had come from James Sinclair, you would have been the first to urge her to accept it: you would never have thought of her youth, or your supposed control over her then. Be honest, my dear Madge," he added, taking her hand as she sat beside him, "and confess that it is so."

"Well, I suppose I must own that," she replied, the

tears starting to her eyes (he so seldom called her by that old familiar name now). "But oh, Richard, you can't understand all I mean : a mother feels so, specially for her child, in a thing like this!" and she leaned her head on his shoulder as in the days of long ago, when she used to come to him with all her little troubles ; and fairly broke down,—a very unusual thing for her to do !

Notwithstanding his stern, proud nature, and seldom as he outwardly showed it, Mr. Forrester was tenderly attached to his wife, and now he soothed her in a way that he alone could do.

"Come," he said at last, "supposo we send for the little heroine, and tell her of her piece of good luck. I shall be curious to see how she takes it."

"Yes : the sooner it is done the better. I only wish telling *her* was all."

"Never mind that," he replied : "Charlotte won't be the first woman in the world who has had to get over a thing of this sort. She will soon be all right again, never fear."

Marian was alone in the school-room when the summons came. She was considerably startled. What could be the matter ? Her hand trembled as she opened the study door : it was a room she had never even seen before, being sacred to the master of the house. Mr. and Mrs. Forrester were both there : the former had an open letter in his hand.

"Come in," he said, kindly, noticing her timid hesitation. "I have got something here that nearly concerns you : but nothing to frighten you," he added, with a smile, as he placed a chair for her. And then he told her all. Her colour rose painfully. What she had vaguely dreaded for so long, then, had come at last !

"Well," said Mr. Forrester, when he had finished; "and what am I to say for you? I suppose you won't keep him long in suspense?—at any rate, you must let me be the first to congratulate you. I am sure you will be very happy."

May did not speak for a moment: then slowly and steadily the words came. "No: I will not keep him in suspense: my answer is quite ready. Tell him, please Mr. Forrester, that it can never, never be. I am not the least fitted to be his wife; besides," she added lower, with drooping eyes, "I could never feel towards him one bit more than I do at present: it is impossible."

"Marian!" ejaculated Mrs. Forrester; and her husband, in almost equal surprise, exclaimed, "My dear child, do you know what you are saying! Surely this is a hasty decision: you cannot mean it—"

"Indeed, I do," she answered, earnestly. "I cannot give myself to anyone I do not love: you would not wish me to do that, sir, would you?" and an innocent, half-reproachful look came from the glistening, hazel eyes.

"No, no: certainly I do not; but I still think you ought to consider the matter well. Remember what you are refusing,—not wealth and position only, but the love of a true, upright man. Such a one as my friend Montague is not to be despised; you will not meet with his like every day, my little girl," he added, passing his hand kindly over the bowed head. "You must let me speak to you as a father would, you know."

"Oh, it is very good of you!" she murmured through her fast-falling tears: that unwonted tenderness had quite overcome her. "But indeed it is not a hasty decision: I cannot love him, I never could. And I don't

want to go away: do let me stay with you." And suddenly rising, she knelt down by Mrs. Forrester. "You don't want me to go, do you? Please say you don't."

"No, my dear child, that I don't! But are you quite sure you know what you are doing? Is it possible you can refuse such a man as Mr. Montague?"

"Quite: quite!" she answered, smiling through her tears. "This is what I have been dreading for a long time; though I have tried all I could to prevent it. Will you write to him, Mr. Forrester, and please tell him never to speak to me about it: it would be of no use, and I would so much rather no one should ever know."

The other two exchanged a glance that May did not see. Charlotte then might be spared, was the mother's instant thought; and who could tell now that sometime or other all might turn out as she desired?

Mr. Forrester wrote as May had asked; telling him her decision, and giving him no false hopes; though, as he said, nothing would have gratified himself more. Three people were not very much surprised to hear the next day that Mr. Montague had suddenly left town on urgent business!

It was at this juncture that Lady Cairne received a letter one morning from London, during breakfast-time, as usual.

"Dear me," she exclaimed, energetically; "here is a piece of news! I am very glad, Marian Leslie is going to be married: she has not lost much time certainly, for she has been in town barely three months."

"Indeed!" said Sir Evelyn, getting up rather suddenly to get something from the side-table.

"Yes: I have heard from a friend of mine, a Miss Montague; it is her brother. Poor thing, she has kept his house so long that it will be a great trial to her to leave; but she says he is so desperately in love that she is sure he will be happy. It seems all to have been settled the very day she wrote (this, it may be remarked, being the same on which Mr. Montague had sent his letter to Mrs. Forrester. It never entered into his sister's head for a moment, that there was a possibility of her Lucius being refused!)

"When is it to be?" asked Sir Evelyn, still stooping over the corned beef, and carving it with the utmost precision.

"Oh, directly, of course; because Miss Montague tells me where she intends to make her home now."

He made no reply; although it hardly seemed as if it were for himself that he had been so busy. Almost immediately afterwards he said something about "business with the steward," and left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Oh, when I look into his eyes and stroke his thoughtful brow,
I dare not think what I should feel were I to lose him now!"

ABOUT the middle of November Sir Evelyn was obliged to be away from Alliston nearly a fortnight, to look after some estates in a distant county. Willy was in despair: he had never been separated from him for so long before.

"Oh, what shall I do to-morrow!" he exclaimed, clinging to him half tearfully, as he wished him good-night: "a fortnight seems such a long time."

"You may be at the Rectory as much as you like," returned his brother, fondly. "I have spoken to Mr. Randolph about it: only remember what Dr. Oakley said last time, about your never being out after four o'clock this month; if you want to stay the evening you must always have the brougham to come home in: don't you forget."

The house did seem certainly very different when Evelyn was gone. He missed him at every turn, and kept much by himself in the school-room: that was pleasanter than being downstairs now! He often rode, —sometimes drove with Lady Cairne or Laura, and was constantly at the Rectory. His first letter from Evelyn was a great delight: he read it over and over again, till he almost knew it by heart. Long after, this and

one or two others that he had written to him at various times were found carefully tied up together among some of Willy's most cherished treasures. One afternoon,—the very day before Sir Evelyn was to return,—he was out driving in the pony carriage with Laura. It was a dull November day; but as they started early there was no fear of Willy being kept out late. As they passed the village of Helstone on their return, the old church clock pointed, however, to half-past three.

"Isn't this the wrong turn?" he asked, presently, when they left the high road for a side lane.

"I want to see Annie Kirby for a minute," replied Laura; "and as we are so near we may as well go there. You're not afraid of being lost?"

"No: only you know Evelyn made me promise not to be out after four, and it's more than half-past three now."

"Ob, I shan't be a moment!" she replied, as they drove up to the door; but finding that Miss Kirby was at home, she desired the groom to take the carriage round for ten minutes, and went in.

She and her friend found a great deal to say to each other. There were several other young people there besides. Then tea must be had, as a matter of course; and so the time went on. Willy ventured once more to remind Laura of Evelyn's wish.

"Dear me,—as if a few minutes could make any difference!" she exclaimed, laughing. "He only meant it as a general thing; besides, we shall be at home in no time when we once start!"

They all joined with her. Talking and laughing went on again, and Willy said no more. It was not till close upon five o'clock that they left the Grange.

Before they had gone a mile a drizzling, misty rain began to fall,—about the worst thing that Willy could have encountered: the very air was dampness itself! Laura urged on the ponies, for she was a little frightened now; but before they reached Alliston he was, as may be supposed, thoroughly chilled. Mrs. Humphreys met them in the hall. “Oh, master Willy!” she exclaimed, “to think of your being out so late: and such a wet night, too! Why, you are quite shivering,” she continued, “and nearly wet through! What will the master say?”

“I couldn’t help it,” was the gentle reply. “I shall soon be warm now.”

“Oh, yes!” put in Laura, rather nervously: “he’ll be all right if you give him something warm, Mrs. Humphreys. Those Kirbys would keep me so,” she added: “I could not get away before.”

“I am afraid master will be very angry, ma’am, however it was,” returned the housekeeper. “He gave the strictest orders that he was never to be out after four o’clock.” She took him off to his room then, where there was a nice fire as usual, and soon had him warm and snug in bed. Laura and her mother tried to re-assure themselves it was absurd to make such a fuss: he would be all right again to-morrow. But when to-morrow came, such was by no means the case: he had nearly lost his voice, and the oppression on his chest was excessive. Mrs. Humphreys wanted to send for a doctor, but Willy only said, “Oh, no: Evelyn will be at home to-night; and I don’t want a stranger!” Here it may be remarked, that Dr. Oakley had left the neighbourhood recently, and had gone to live in London.

That evening Sir Evelyn came home. Lady Cairne met him in the hall. "Where is Willy?" was his first inquiry: he had made so sure of seeing him the moment he arrived.

"He wasn't quite well this morning, and we persuaded him to keep upstairs: there is nothing really the matter."

His look changed; but he went on quickly without a word. In the corridor upstairs Mrs. Humphreys met him and just told him how all had happened. He entered the room. Willy was sitting on a low seat by the fire, carefully wrapped up. What was it that sent a pang to his brother's heart the moment he saw him?

"My dear child!" he exclaimed, as Willy came eagerly into his arms: "what is all this? How do you feel? tell me."

"Only so very glad to have you back again!" he whispered, as his head drooped caressingly on his shoulder. And then, as Evelyn sat down before the fire and held him still, he looked as if he had got all he wanted.

By degrees Sir Evelyn learned the whole truth. He felt very indignant; but Willy said all he possibly could in Laura's excuse. He would not be satisfied, however, till he had seen someone, and at once dispatched a messenger to Archester for Dr. Irvine. He was no stranger. Evelyn thought of what he had heard,—of his tenderness with children, and its cause,—and felt that he would rather see Willy in his hands than any others. Willy, too, remembered the tall, grave doctor, who had spoken so kindly to him, and was quite willing he should come.

It was nearly nine o'clock when he arrived. Willy

had been in bed some time; but Evelyn gave him a short account of what had happened. The doctor's heart misgave him as he heard of his exposure to the raw, chill damp of a November evening, though he would not say a word to increase his brother's evident anxiety and alarm. He came in, in his very gentle, quiet way to Willy's room, and again was forcibly struck with that fragile childish beauty that had before so impressed him. He sat down beside him, questioned and prescribed for him, gave a few directions to Mrs. Humphreys, and then went with Sir Evelyn from the room. "What do you think of him?" inquired the latter, hurriedly, for somehow he feared he knew not what!

"I think there is cause for anxiety just now, but not for alarm," said Dr. Irvine. "You will have to take him to some warmer place for the winter, though, as soon as he is fit to travel."

"Anywhere,—everywhere that is likely to do him good: but tell me is there anything to be really afraid of?" He looked so pale, so anxious, as he spoke, that Dr. Irvine was instinctively reminded of his own bitter grief of long ago: he was a good man, sorrow had done its holy work in him.

"He is in safer hands than ours," he said, gently: "but I think—I believe—there is every reason to hope. The question is, whether he will have strength to rally if this attack should prove a serious one; and I honestly tell you I have some fears of that."

Those fears were realized: a sharp attack of inflammation of the lungs supervened, and for some days his life was in danger. Oh, the suspense, the anxiety of those days! Evelyn hardly ever left him; the child

seemed to cling to him more than ever now: almost everything he took was from his hands. Dr. Irvine was in constant attendance, and at last his little patient began to mend. Great was the relief and joy throughout the whole house when he was pronounced convalescent; for he was beloved by the servants, one and all; and actually idolized by his own special attendant "George." He had waited on him the whole time with unceasing care, never sparing himself night or day. Willy's gentle, grateful words and looks were more than full payment to him.

Lady Cairne and her daughter were not in a particularly enviable state of mind just now, as may be supposed. They saw very little of Sir Evelyn; and his manner, when they did meet, was, perhaps unconsciously to himself, constrained and changed. He had received Laura's excuses and protestations with an absolute quietness that was more expressive than any words. She felt that she had, by that one act of thoughtless self-pleasing, placed an insurmountable barrier between herself and her cousin.

At last Willy was sufficiently recovered to travel. Evelyn thought of Nice or Mentone; but the child begged so earnestly for Ventnor, as the Eversleys were spending the winter there, that, with Dr. Irvine's permission, he consented. Very happy were the weeks they spent there; the two families were close together, and Harry Wyndham a constant visitor; for the wedding was to take place in the summer. Among them all Willy was watched over and tended like a delicate little flower, as he was: they seemed to vie with each other who should do most for him. The sea breezes began at last to tell upon him, a slight colour

returned to the pale cheeks, and his appetite improved, so that Dr. Irvine appeared satisfied when he came down to see him. He was able to ride again when the days were warm, for Snowdrop had accompanied them ; Evelyn walking by his side, and often Grace and Mabel too, the latter full of life and spirits as usual. Grace was his favourite ; she would come and sit with him and talk or read as he liked best, always constituting herself head nurse when Sir Evelyn was away, as he was not seldom obliged to be. He would run back to Alliston for a couple of nights, attend to all his business there, and then return laden with fruit and flowers, and various country treasures not to be had by the sea. How Willy loved to sit on his knee then, and hear everything about home, and all that Evelyn could tell him of Mr. Randolph, or his school-fellows, or Johnny Cave ! The months passed on : April had come, bringing little change, except that somehow, gradually, almost imperceptibly, Willy seemed to be losing rather than gaining strength. Dr. Irvine began to feel anxious ; though, as he often said, he hoped that the warm summer weather would set him to rights again.

Evelyn would not see any cause for alarm ; each day he tried to convince himself that he was certainly better and stronger than yesterday. The Eversleys, too, were sanguine ; spring was always a trying time, especially this month and the next. The only one who was never anxious, who never spoke of being well again, was Willy himself ! Tenderly, gratefully as ever he clung to the loved ones around him, and entered with intense delight into all the beauties of the springtide : but within that childish soul a voice was

whispering, telling of a home brighter and fairer than any earthly one; and he knew that to that bright home he was hastening. The thought to him was full of gladness; his only grief was that he could never approach the subject with Evelyn, the very idea was so bitter to him that he turned from it almost with impatience. He would not see that gradually the little form he held grew more and more fragile, that the colour came and went more fitfully, and that the brilliancy of the loving eyes was all too beautiful. Dr. Irvine, however, awoke now to the certainty of what he had vaguely feared from the first moment that he saw him. To him Willy spoke unreservedly, "I don't seem to want ever to get well," he said one day, as he was sitting beside him; "if only Evelyn would not be unhappy for me."

"Perhaps, though, you may get quite strong again, my dear child," said the doctor, as soon as he could trust himself; "we cannot tell just now. But I am very glad to know," he added, gently, "that you are not afraid; that you can trust yourself in God's hands, whichever way it is."

"Oh, Dr. Irvine, why should I be afraid? I think I feel nearer to Him every day. It won't be long before Jesus comes to fetch me now," and the child spoke in a tone of calm unconscious certainty. "But there is one thing I long for very much. I want you to let Evelyn take me home to Alliston again: will you?" he continued, looking up at him eagerly. "I do long to see it all once more."

Dr. Irvine was almost afraid to risk the journey so soon, and Sir Evelyn much wished to try what the south of France or Italy would do for his darling; but at last

the former saw so plainly that the child was right,—that the gentle spirit had already received the summons which no earthly skill or care could stay,—that he advised his brother to return: possibly, as he said, the change back to his dearly-loved home might benefit him more than anything else. It really did seem as if Willy revived a little then. Once more he was out in the garden, or under the lime tree with Evelyn. Sometimes he would still go for a short ride, or drive with him in the low easy pony-carriage. Tenderly as ever Evelyn watched over him, anxiously trying to assure himself that he was getting better. Willy would now and then gently attempt to make him realize what he felt so sure of himself, but he could not bear it. Gradually, however, he was obliged to see it, for his strength began to decline fast. Dr. Irvine saw him constantly. The fair child who had so irresistibly reminded him of his own little lost one lay very near his heart. Mr. Randolph was often with him too. The Eversleys never missed a day without coming, if only to inquire; and the kindest sympathy was shown by the whole neighbourhood. But still Evelyn was as ever his most dearly-loved companion, his nurse, his second self, as it seemed; he was never so easy or so happy as when in his arms. How often, how earnestly would he seek to turn his thoughts to the things he loved best himself, and Evelyn listened as he never had before; for it seemed almost as if an angel voice were speaking, such a halo of unearthly purity and beauty hung around that childish spirit now. One day he was carrying him round by the shrubbery path; it was a soft lovely afternoon; the balmy air seemed to revive him. They passed the little gate leading from the grounds to the church.

"Will you take me inside for a moment, Evelyn? I should like to see the dear old church."

He opened the gate, and soon they were in the quiet beautifully-kept churchyard,—before them the same old porch that May Leslie had admired so much. Evelyn sat down there, and for some minutes both were silent.

"Evelyn," said Willy, at last. "Do you see that bright little tree there?" and he pointed to a fine young willow, that grew close by the shrubbery gate. "Under that is where I should like to lie: I have often thought so. I should like to have the grass and the leaves over me, and the sun shining through them as it is to-day. And then you would pass so near it every Sunday," he added, dreamily,—"every Sunday when you came to church. And you would think of me: shouldn't you, Evelyn dear?"

But Evelyn could not answer him. The big tears were in his eyes, though he turned hurriedly away that Willy might not see them. What he answered, or how he got through the rest of that walk, he never knew.

This was one of the last times that Willy ever left the house. By degrees he grew too weak to bear even that slight exertion; then even the coming down-stairs was too much for him. He lay most of the day on a couch, in his own room, drawn close to the window, whence he could look over the garden and the park and the blue hills beyond. Tranquil and sweet were those last days of Willy's life. There was no suffering, only a gradual, still almost imperceptible, decline of strength; and yet at times he seemed so like himself, and was always so bright and cheerful that even now Sir Evelyn could not give up all hope.

CHAPTER XVII.

“Oh, Willy, Willy, rest is sweet,
Reposing at Emmanuel’s feet !
But thou, pale lily, shalt be blest,
Safe folded to thy Saviour’s breast.

“The evening sun no more shall greet
The quiet music of thy feet ;
But angels shall, my child, e’er long,
Teach thee a nobler, sweeter song ;
And seraphs shall rejoice to hear
Thy footfalls in a brighter sphere.”

From a poem, “William of Grantchester, Chorister of Kings.”

BY E. T. A.

ONE afternoon Willy was lying as usual propped up by pillows ; Mrs. Humphreys was in the room, but it was Evelyn who was sitting beside him.

“Evelyn,” said the child, opening his eyes. “Oh, you are here ! Is any one else here too ?”

“Only Mrs. Humphreys. Do you want anything ?”

“Will she go for a minute ?” he asked gently. “I want to have you all to myself this once, Evelyn : may I ?”

“Certainly !” replied his brother, as he got up and said a word or two to Mrs. Humphreys, promising to call her directly if she was wanted. Then she went, and he came back and knelt down by the side of the little couch.

"What is it?" he said, gazing with infinite tenderness at the sweet pale face before him.

Willy took possession of his hand, as he replied, rather wistfully:—

"There is something I have been wanting to say to you for such a long time, but somehow I have always felt afraid."

"Afraid, my dear child! Why should you say that?" Surely you're not afraid of *me*!" he added, with a yearning smile.

"No: never now. And yet about this I could not help it a little." And then rather hesitatingly he went on:—"Do you remember that Sunday, long ago, when—when I could not do as you wished, because I was afraid it would be wrong?"

"I do," replied his brother, sadly; and a grieved look came into his face as he spoke.

"Oh, but you mustn't think of it so!" exclaimed the child, in an anxious tone. "I was not meaning that the very least. Don't look unhappy about it, Evelyn. But it was only because from that very day I began to think so much of this, that I could not help reminding you."

"Well," he said, with a sigh, "what is it? Anything I can I will do."

"I want you to promise me, then,—I hope you won't mind my saying it,—I have often thought I never could, but now I must,—I want you to promise me, Evelyn, that on Sundays, when I have left you, that you won't read common books and newspapers any more; because, you see," he went on, with an evident effort, "Sunday was given us to learn about good things, and how to get to heaven; and I want,—oh, I want so much to

know,"—and he tried in vain to steady his voice,—“to know that I shall meet you there !”

He raised himself slightly, and twining one little arm round his brother's neck he hid his face there too ; for the tears would come. No one could tell what an effort those words had cost him.

“ My darling,” replied Evelyn, in a choked voice, “ I do promise ! I promise faithfully : if for no other reason, for your sake. There now, you must not be troubled about it any more, it is not good for you.”

“ Oh, Evelyn,” he whispered, “ how happy you have made me ! I hardly dared to hope it.”

He lay back then, and for a minute his eyes were closed and his lips moved as if in prayer ; then he looked up again with a smile of unutterable sweetness.

“ There is one more thing, Evelyn ; you must let me say that too. I want you to have my little Bible for your very own,—I want to give it you. You'll think of me sometimes, I know, and then it will seem almost like talking to me, you see.”

“ Oh, my child,” exclaimed Evelyn, with a groan of irrepressible anguish, “ don't talk so ! How can I bear it ? Surely—surely God will be merciful, and not take you from me yet !”

He spoke as if half to himself, and bowed down his head on the pillow beside him. It is always a strange sad thing to see a man in great grief. Willy seemed to feel it so. He passed his little thin hand softly over Evelyn's head, as he whispered :—

“ Oh, don't cry, dear Evelyn ; I did not mean to make you unhappy. You mustn't,” he added, earnestly, feeling the sobs that shook Evelyn's strong frame ; and he tried to raise him up, that he might kiss his tears

away. Evelyn struggled with himself: he knew that any excitement was bad for him; but Willy's simple words had completely broken down all his self-command. It was with a great effort that he controlled himself now: he clasped the child fervently in his arms for a moment, and then gently laid him down among his pillows again. For a minute Willy was silent; then with a sort of wistful look, as if half afraid of paining him, "Let me give it you now," he said. And he took up the little well-worn Bible that always lay beside him, the look of which Evelyn knew so well.

"See,—I have often put pencil marks against the verses I have loved best, so you will know when you see them: the ones in ink are not mine. And look, Evelyn, here in the cover is one of my favourite hymns, 'Jesus, lover of my soul;' you will read that too, won't you? I think it was that hymn," he added, lower, "that first made me think of all He had done for me: and now,—oh, where should I be without Him!" There was a moment's pause. "You will feel the same some day, Evelyn; I know,—I am sure of it: I have asked for it so often. And when you read this you'll remember your own little Willy, and how I longed for you to be a Christian."

Sir Evelyn took the book into his hand; but for a moment he could not trust himself to speak. He gazed at it through his blinding tears; but choking them back, he said, as calmly as he could, "I shall value and treasure it as my very life! But who knows," he added, trying to recover himself, and speak cheerfully, "that you mayn't be able to read it with me yourself some day: you *are* a little bit stronger to-day I think, aren't you?" and he looked at him anxiously, as if

his very longing could avail to keep him still beside him.

"No, dear Evelyn," said Willy, earnestly: "you must not think so. I am not really stronger, and I know before long I shall be gone. I shall never sit under the lime tree and read to you again. But you will go there sometimes, and you won't forget me; and oh, then, perhaps God will let me be your little angel to watch over you, and I shall be near you, though you won't see me. I hope it will be so." And as the child spoke, a dreamy, far-away look came over his features, and his eyes turned from their loving, wistful gaze at the face and form he loved best on earth, to the glowing, evening sky, as if beyond the sunset clouds he almost caught visions of the home and the angels he loved so well; and for a time he seemed lost in thought.

Evelyn sat with one hand still clasped in Willy's, the other covering his face. Presently the blue eyes turned to him again, tenderly.

"You will read it, Evelyn dear, for my sake: won't you? Give me just this one more promise, to make me quite, quite happy."

"I promise," said Evelyn; but he added no more: his grief seemed greater than he could bear. He had been going over those few bright years of Willy's life, that had been so full of sweetness to him, and now the very thought of losing him was bitterness itself: ay, more intensely so because he could not as yet discern the love that was directing all his sorrow. Willy's half-perplexed, half-troubled look recalled him.

"Yes, my boy, I promise. I shall not forget: you need not be afraid."

"You will come to love it as I have done," mur-

mured the child; "and it will be such a help and comfort to you."

"Comfort!" repeated Evelyn, as if half to himself: "there is no comfort for me, God knows." And Willy saw a great tear trickle through his fingers as he spoke. But again he tried to force himself into outward composure; determining, for his sake, not to give way again.

"You don't know how happy you have made me," said Willy, after a pause. "These two things I had been longing to ask you so much; but somehow I never could before."

"Is there anything in the world I would not do for you, my darling? But now I must not let you talk any more: will you try and go to sleep again?"

The child smiled happily, a great weight was off his mind; but the effort had exhausted him considerably: he closed his eyes.

"You will stay with me a little longer, won't you, Evelyn? I like so to feel you near, all my own;" and then, with his hand fast locked in his, he seemed to doze off quietly. And Evelyn sat and watched him: oh, with what a breaking heart he saw plainly now, what he had been vainly trying to hide from himself,—that Willy's words were true, that the gentle little spirit was indeed pluming for its last flight now!

Fair as sculptured marble were the soft outlines of those childish features, and wasted to a degree the little hand he held. No: he could not blind himself any longer: never, till now, had the full inevitable truth forced itself upon him so hopelessly. He thought of all Willy's childish love and devotion to himself, of his winning ways, and the earnest pleadings he had

from time to time so timidly ventured upon ; and there by the side of that little couch, the strong man bowed his rebellious heart, and resolved that he would, at any rate, try to find out for himself what was the secret of that child's happiness and hope ; and what his trust in that unseen Redeemer, that could thus lighten the valley he was passing through,—so dreaded by the bravest men of this world, but to him so full of brightness and peace. After a time Willy opened his eyes.

“ Dear Evelyn,” he murmured ; “ are you there still ? ”

“ Yes,” he answered, rousing himself, and speaking in his usual tone ; “ and now its time you had something : what is it to be ? ” and he got up to the table on which various little tempting delicacies were arranged, one of which he proceeded to administer himself, much to Willy's amusement.

“ Why, you're feeding me as if I was a baby,” he said, laughing at his business-like manner.

“ And what else are you ? ” returned Evelyn, with a fond kiss. “ You see I don't trust you to eat enough yourself, so I have to see to it.”

It was often strangely touching to see the two together now. In the full pride of his youthful strength and manhood, spirited, almost hasty as he was to others, to his little brother Evelyn was as gentle as a woman : he would hold him on his knees, or walk about the room with him, when he was restless and weary, for an hour at a time. Willy thought no one could do this as Evelyn could. His arms were like a cradle to him : so strong and safe ; and he loved the low tones in which he would soothe or sing him to sleep. But with his characteristic unselfishness he often tried to persuade him to go out for a ride or a

walk, saying that it did him good to hear all he had been doing; though the brightening eye and eager welcome told how gladly he saw him come back again.

Lady Cairne and Laura were assiduous in their offers of help, but they were not very much with him. It could hardly be supposed that their society was specially congenial, though none could have guessed this from the child's gentle, grateful bearing. He always seemed anxious to put them at their ease,—particularly Laura;—and never by word or look reminded her of what she could never forget. To Evelyn he clung now with, if possible, increasing affection: his voice, his hand, his smile, soothed him as none other could. He and good old Mrs. Humphreys were, in their different ways, the comfort of his little life. Just as the little refection was finished (and Willy was looking all the better for it and his short sleep), a message came to Sir Evelyn that Mr. Randolph was in the library waiting to see him.

“Oh, Evelyn, do you think he would come up and see me for a minute!” exclaimed Willy. “I should like to see him.”

“Certainly, if you wish it. But aren't you too tired to-day: hadn't you better wait till to-morrow?”

“Ah, but he will be gone then: he said he was going out to-morrow for nearly a week.”

“I'll bring him up then; but not just yet: you must be quite quiet, and rest for a while,” and Evelyn went downstairs.

He had been trying to keep up for Willy's sake; but it was hard work. Mr. Randolph was struck by the anxious, almost haggard look on his face as he came in.

"How is he to-day?" he asked, as they shook hands.

"Oh," exclaimed Evelyn, as he flung himself down on the sofa, "it's all darkness: misery! I can't blind myself any longer. He's going, Mr. Randolph,—going fast; and what shall I do? no one can ever tell what that child has been to me!"

Mr. Randolph was hardly prepared for this. He knew how fondly Sir Evelyn was attached to his little brother; but this was almost more than he expected. With the most delicate sympathy and tenderness he strove to comfort him. He spoke of the Love that was sending the bitter sorrow,—hard as it was to realize it then,—and of the sure and certain happiness that was awaiting his darling. Gradually his words seemed to take effect. Sir Evelyn held out his hand, saying, gratefully,—

"Thank you, for reminding me of that! I know,—I see now that there is something real in it all. God grant I may find it out for myself some day!"

It was the first time he had ever said so much as this. Mr. Randolph was silent for a moment from surprise and joy. "You will surely do so, my dear friend, if you seek it earnestly: none were ever disappointed there."

No word was spoken then for many minutes. The pastor's heart was full of wondering gratitude at the answer which had come at last to so many prayers; and partly, too, he knew well, as the result of the quiet patient efforts and unconscious influence of the gentle child, so dear to them both. Sir Evelyn roused himself at last.

"You wanted me for something, didn't you?" he asked.

"Yes: if you can spare me a quarter of an hour. I have some papers for you to sign, and one or two parish matters to talk over with you before I leave to-morrow. I am sorry to be going just now, very; but in my father's present state I dare not refuse."

"Oh, no: certainly not! Besides, you will not be away long?"

"I hope to be back by Thursday week, at latest." And then they drew up to the table, and for the next half-hour were fully occupied.

As Mr. Randolph rose to go, Sir Evelyn said,—

"Willy wants to see you before you go. Shall you have time now?"

"Yes: I am in no hurry. But won't it be too much for him to-day?"

"I think not: he seemed so to have set his heart upon it. I hardly know why."

But even as he spoke did not a thought of what *might* have been the real reason flash across him! But he put it away. They went upstairs together. As they entered the room Mr. Randolph was startled at the change that the last few days had wrought in the child. The almost ethereal beauty and transparency of his features struck him forcibly; but he went up to him, and taking his hand, said, cheerfully,—

"Well, Willy: how are you to-day? I hear you wanted to see me."

He looked up with a bright smile; but the flush that his entrance had caused faded fast away.

"I'm very comfortable, thank you, sir; and so much obliged to you for coming!"

Evelyn was standing by Mr. Randolph. Willy's eye went from one to the other: the two he loved so well;

but, true to its allegiance, rested finally on his brother, with a sort of yearning look of which he was hardly conscious. Evelyn seemed to read it, however, as with a half sigh he said,—

“I’m going down now to finish my letters; but I shall leave you in good hands. Only don’t let him tire himself, Mr. Randolph,” and with one farewell touch on Willy’s forehead he went away.

“Dear Evelyn!” exclaimed the child, with starting tears: “he does take such care of me. He can’t bear to think I’m going; and yet I am, Mr. Randolph,” he went on, calmly, as the latter seated himself beside him: “I know it. I feel I cannot be here much longer, and that is why I wanted to see you to-day, to ask you—”

“What?” said Mr. Randolph, encouragingly, noticing the timid fall in his voice.

“Why, I wanted to ask you if you will sometimes come to Evelyn,—as often as you can I mean, when I am gone? He will miss me at first, I think, because you see he has had me so much with him lately. And oh, I thought,” he continued, earnestly, “that you would talk to him now and then, and help him as you have helped me! You understand”....

“I do understand, my dear child,” replied Mr. Randolph, as steadily as he could, “and I will surely do as you wish. But I think,—I believe that Sir Evelyn is changing even now. He has spoken to me only this very day as he never did before; and I am sure, my little boy, that you have had much to do with it.”

“I! Oh, what have I ever done, Mr. Randolph! How often I have grieved because I dared not speak to him as I longed to do. But he has let me read to him

sometimes, and now and then talk to him ; and I have prayed for him, ah, many and many a time. My dear Evelyn ! " he murmured, as if half-unconsciously. " Oh, if I could only *know* that I should see him again in heaven ! "

" We must trust that in God's hands," replied Mr. Randolph, tenderly : " all things are possible to Him. And you know He has said, ' Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing ye *shall* receiveye. ' "

" Ah, that is beautiful ! " said Willy.

He lay for a few moments with his eyes closed, and Mr. Randolph did not interrupt him. He opened them again, and clasping the hand he still held, said sweetly,—

" And I wanted to see you once more, sir, to thank you for always being so very kind to me. I've often wondered what I should have done if you had been different."

" And yet how frightened you were that first morning : do you remember ? You evidently thought me a most formidable personage then."

" I know I did," said Willy, smiling. " But I thought learning Latin would be something very terrible. I used to see my cousins in Scotland in such trouble with theirs."

" Yes. But you always brought me your Latin so well prepared that there was no reason for you to be afraid, you see."

" Ah, that was Evelyn ! He always made me say it over to him first. I used to go to him every morning. Those happy mornings ! " he added, dreamily. Then after a pause, he said, " I should like Walter to have my desk, Mr. Randolph : it is such a nice one, and he

was always so good to me. Will you give it him, with my dear love, when he comes home?"

Walter was Mr. Randolph's eldest son; and though several years Willy's senior, had been from the first his staunch friend and protector.

"Perhaps you may see him yourself, my child," he replied, in rather a husky voice. "He talks of being home by Saturday week."

"No," said Willy, smiling peacefully: "I think not. I think before that *I* shall have gone home, Mr. Randolph. I can't talk about it much to Evelyn, it makes him so unhappy; but I like to think of it. I long to be there,—except,—oh, its only the thought of leaving him, and that I can never do anything more for him, that makes me wish to stay!" and the tears fell fast.

Gently his kind friend soothed him. He reminded him how he had committed his beloved one into the best of all hands, and that he must try and cast all his anxiety on the Saviour he trusted himself, who had promised so much to the simple asking of faith; and soon Willy was tranquil again.

"Will you pray with me once more?" he whispered.

Mr. Randolph knelt beside him, one little hand still in his own, and in a few earnest simple words commended the soul of his beloved little pupil into the hands of his merciful Redeemer. Then he prayed that his heart's desire might be granted,—that the brother he loved so devotedly might be made one of the Lord's own servants, and found at His right hand at last.

This seemed to calm him wonderfully. From that time the only cloud that had shadowed him passed away. In the sweet assurance that the answer would come was lost even the thought and pain of the earthly parting.

"And now," said Mr. Randolph, as he stood over him and laid his hand on Willy's head, "the Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Good Shepherd watch over His little lamb, and bring him safely to His happy fold." And then stooping down, for the first and last time he folded him in his arms and kissed him tenderly.

Willy clung to him with a mingling of surprise, love, and reverence. It was some minutes before either spoke.

"Good-bye, my dear child," said Mr. Randolph, at last. "I must not stay longer."

"Good-bye: and thank you so much, sir, for all you have done for me to-day. And oh, if I don't see you again here, I shall see you in heaven!"

Mr. Randolph could not trust himself to speak. With one farewell clasp he left him. But the last vision that he had of him sitting up there on his little couch, with the fading flush on his cheeks, and the unearthly beauty of the lustrous eyes that followed him so lovingly, never passed from his memory. It was some time before he could command himself sufficiently to go down-stairs. He did not wonder at his brother's grief now. He went and stood by one of the windows in the long corridor till the dimness had passed from his eyes. It was a lovely evening; and as he looked out over the smooth lawns with their sunny terraces of flowers, now in all the radiance of their summer beauty, and on to the glassy waters of the lake, he thought of that fairer, brighter home to which that little pilgrim was hastening, and blessed God that at eventide it was indeed light with him. He turned then and went down-stairs.

"Well," began Sir Evelyn, as he opened the library door; but the look on Mr. Randolph's face stopped him.

"It is well with him," he answered, earnestly. "Oh, how well!" he added, no more.

The two friends wrung each other's hand in silence, and Mr. Randolph went away. Sir Evelyn turned back into the room and for a long hour struggled with his sorrow. For the first time in his life he prayed from the very depths of his heart, and He who answers prayer heard and remembered him.

What need to dwell on the days that followed? The slowly failing strength, the gentle taking down of the frail earthly tabernacle. But all was so peaceful, so bright about Willy, it was difficult to realize that the end was near. It came at last.

Evelyn was kneeling beside the bed, his arm supporting him, and the other hand clasping the little fingers that had instinctively sought his. Mrs. Humphreys was there, and Dr. Irvine too. He had been lying apparently unconscious for some time. All was so still, so calm, the faintest whisper might have been heard. There was a half-smile on his face, as if the parting spirit were even now holding converse with things beyond mortal ken,—as if

"Shadows of angel wings were there,
Passing across those features fair."

He opened his eyes. They fell upon Evelyn as he knelt beside him.

"I thought I was there," he murmured. "Evelyn!"

"What is it, my darling?" he asked, anxiously.

"Tell me the verse you've so often read to me about the valley, and fearing no evil."

Evelyn knew it well, and softly repeated those beautiful verses from the twenty-third Psalm:—

“‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou *art* with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.’”

“Ah, that is it!” he said. “I am passing through the shadow now. But He is with me, Evelyn; so near, so precious!”

His eyes closed again for a minute: no one spoke.

“Where is Mrs. Humphreys?” he asked, presently. She came to his side.

“I want to thank you for all you have done for me. But don’t cry,—don’t be sorry for me, dear Mrs. Humphreys: I am very happy!” and he drew her down to him as he spoke, and kissed her fondly. “Take care of Evelyn,” he whispered, “and don’t let him grieve for me.”

“Oh, my sweet lamb,” exclaimed poor Mrs. Humphreys, “how can I bear it? It will break my heart to lose you!”

She could only return his embrace with silent fervency, and turn hurriedly away to hide her tears.

“And aunt Cairne and Laura: where are they? Let me say good-bye to them too.”

As they in turn knelt beside him and received his last kiss, their bitter feelings may better be imagined than described.

All this time his hand was fast in Evelyn’s. He seemed uneasy if he were away from him for a moment now. When they were gone he turned towards him, and with an indescribable look of wistful tenderness once more laid down his head on his breast.

“My darling child,” whispered Evelyn, “haven’t you tired yourself too much?”

“No: it is over now.” And then in tones too low for any one else to hear, he murmured:—

"Evelyn, my own Evelyn, what can I say to you ? You have been all the world to me ; and oh, how I have loved you !"

The effort Evelyn had been making for the last half-hour to control himself was beyond his strength, and now the deep sobs that shook his frame seemed to come from the very depths of a stricken heart. The child looked up anxiously.

"Ah, no !" he whispered. "You mustn't. Don't grieve for me, Evelyn dear : I'm only going a little while before you. You'll come too : I know you will. Jesus will bring you to me." And as he spoke he clasped his arms about him, and the two were locked in a long embrace,—so fervent, so lingering, as if each felt it was the last on earth.

And then he lay quite still again, only now and then his eyes were raised as if in prayer. So another hour passed ; but gradually a change came over him : it was a bright, a beautiful change. Surely the glories of heaven were unfolding before that childish soul, and lighting up the marble features !

Dr. Irvine was beside him now, his finger on the fluttering pulse ; Evelyn on the other side, supporting him as before. They were all watching, for they knew that the end was near. Once more the blue eyes opened ; and once more, true to the last, they rested on Evelyn with an expression of ineffable tenderness. His lips moved slightly, but they caught no sound.

"Does he know me ? Oh, my child, speak to me once more !" exclaimed Evelyn in his agony, hardly knowing what he said.

"My Evelyn !" he murmured, with a last look of love, as his little fingers feebly closed over his again. He

lay still then, only that each breath seemed to grow fainter and fainter than the last. Suddenly a look of joy irradiated his features, he gazed upwards as at some passing vision of glory: "Jesus!" was the one word that fell from the parted lips, as the eyelids drooped again. Evelyn felt the little hand relax its hold, and all was over!

Willy was at rest: the gentle spirit had passed to the God who gave it. Sweet child! We will not wish thee back again! Thy brief pilgrimage among us is over. But now hath dawned upon thee that bright day that knows no ending; and safe in the bosom of the Saviour thou hast loved, thy rest shall for ever be.

No words can paint his brother's grief when first he awoke to the consciousness that Willy was gone,—that the loving eyes would never beam on him again, nor the little voice murmur its welcome. It was almost by force at last that they got him from the room; and then, utterly worn out by all the grief and watching he had gone through, he fell into a long heavy sleep.

What an awakening it was! Dr. Irvine had hard work to make him take anything, though he had scarcely tasted food that day.

"Oh, let me go back there," he exclaimed, brokenly: "I cannot rest here." And he saw that remonstrance was useless.

The light came in softly through the shaded windows, and there on the little bed, where he had himself so often laid him, rested the fair sleeping form. The long fringed lids were closed for ever now, the golden curls fell in their wonted profusion round the marble brow: but, oh, what a smile of ineffable sweetness lingered there, telling, how unmistakably, of "heaven's peace within!"

The hands were folded peacefully on the breast, and pure white flowers were scattered over him. Evelyn stood motionless for a moment, gazing on the child he had loved so well.

"Oh, my darling: my darling!" he exclaimed, suddenly throwing himself on his knees beside the bed; and for a while his grief was uncontrollable. But Dr. Irvine let it have its way, and gradually he grew calmer; the hush of that sweet presence seemed to steal over his spirit and soothe it to rest.

After that the one place where he loved to be was that room,—Willy's little Bible always in his hand: and who shall tell the change that was wrought in that once proud spirit during those quiet hours! Mr. Randolph was often with him; his deep sympathy and words of hope and comfort sometimes seemed to fall like oil on the troubled waters; at others, all attempts to comfort him were unavailing. Lady Rythesdale had come to him at once, and his friend Harry Wyndham was also at Alliston.

The last day arrived: Evelyn seemed to go through it all as in a dream.

They laid his darling to rest in the sweet sunny spot he had himself chosen. But was it Willy he was leaving there? No: he was with the angels far away! Only the precious sleeping dust was committed to the quiet earth, in sure and certain hope that the morning of the resurrection should awaken it to life again.

During the service he bore up tolerably; but as he took his last look into the little grave, the barriers all gave way; he was so completely overcome that his friend had to support him almost as if he had been a child!

For days after this he seemed in a sort of stupor,

wandering restlessly about, and looking paler and sadder every day; it was as if the interest of his life had been suddenly cut short, and the reaction of all he had gone through was telling upon him terribly. Lady Rythesdale grew uneasy: she looked upon him as one of her own children, and watched him with tender anxiety.

At last she prevailed upon him to say that he would return with her to London, where the family were just on the eve of starting for the Continent; for she felt that complete change was an absolute necessity for him. As long as he remained at Alliston, where everything so reminded him of Willy, he could not shake off his sorrow. His consent was very slow to gain, but when once it was settled no time was to be lost.

The last evening before they left he was sitting alone in his room attempting to read; but his thoughts were wandering back to the childish companionship that had once made those quiet hours so sweet to him. He threw down his paper, and was leaning with his arms on the table, his head bowed down upon them, when George came in to ask him some little question about tomorrow's start.

"Oh, it does not matter," replied Sir Evelyn, wearily. "Anything they like, as far as I am concerned!"

The sight of his master's grief was too much for poor George: he had just been in Willy's room, tenderly putting away some of his little treasures, and his heart was very full. He attempted to speak, but his voice faltered. Sir Evelyn looked up: he seemed to realize for the first time the sorrow that faithful heart must have known for the little one he had served so devotedly. He held out his hand, saying, brokenly, "Ah, my poor

fellow, I understand: I know how you loved him ; " and for a moment ordinary distinctions were forgotten, and the two felt that they met on common ground. Sir Evelyn's head was bowed again, and he sat as before ; but from that hour Willy's faithful attendant had won a place in his master's regard that he never lost.

The next morning they left Alliston. Gradually, very gradually, in the society of his young cousins, and in scenes of foreign beauty and travel, he began, in some measure, to recover: but Sir Evelyn was a changed man. Willy's Bible was still his constant companion and study; its holy lessons sank into his heart, and while life was still before him he turned to Him who, by the sending of this great sorrow, had drawn his heart to seek for rest in Himself alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“I do not love thee ! No : I do not love thee ;
And yet it seems that sometimes when I’m sad
I envy e’en the deep blue sky above thee,
Whose quiet stars may see thee and be glad ! ”

“ALLISTON ! I seem to have heard that name somewhere,” remarked Charlotte Forrester, as she glanced over the first column of the *Times* one day. May Leslie started : she looked up anxiously, but did not speak, and Charlotte read aloud.

“On the 13th inst., at Alliston Park, ‘Willy,’ only and beloved brother of Sir Evelyn C. Alliston, Bart., and youngest son of the late Sir Hugh Alliston, aged ten years.”

May’s work dropped from her hands, and with an inarticulate cry she rushed from the room.

“Dear me ! ” exclaimed Charlotte : “what is the matter with Marian ? I do remember now,” she added, “that Lady Cairne said she had been there with her for two nights : but surely she can’t pretend to know much of them ! ”

“Oh, I know ! ” exclaimed Edith, as she followed her.

“Dear Marian : what is it ? ” And she put her arms

round her. "Is it,—can it be that dear little Willy that you've so often told me about?"

"Yes," faltered May: "it must be; and I never knew he was ill. Oh, I did love him so! What will his brother do?"

"I am so sorry for you!" said Edith, lovingly.

May felt soothed by the childish sympathy, though it seemed as if no one could enter fully into all she felt. How she longed to know all about him; and yet how impossible it seemed, after that long, long silence. She knew well how Sir Evelyn would grieve; but she could offer no word of sympathy. Truly, in that one manoeuvre Lady Cairne had succeeded beyond her expectations!

Time passed on. Grace Eversley's marriage took place in August; but still Sir Evelyn remained away. The coming back to Alliston Lady Rythesdale dreaded for him; but it had to be gone through at last. So about the middle of November he returned, under the promise that he should spend Christmas at the Towers. It was a sad coming home, though by this time the first sharpness of his sorrow had passed away. He missed his little shadow, as he used so fondly to call him, at every turn. The study seemed very empty and still now; and it was a long time before he could bring himself to go to the shrubbery walk and the old lime tree. Lady Cairne and Laura wanted him to have people in the house, to "amuse" him, as they said. But this he utterly declined,—especially as his time at home was so short.

On the first Sunday he walked alone to church, purposely leaving the house long before the others. He felt that he could bear no one near him as he passed

that spot. A beautiful white marble slab now marked the spot where Willy was resting, bearing a simple inscription, and these lines below:—

“ Oh, not in cruelty, not in wrath,
The Reaper came that day :
’Twas an angel visited the green earth
And took my flower away ! ”

It was some time before he recovered himself sufficiently to enter the church. The bell was dropping. Lady Cairne and Laura were already in the pew.

Many eyes followed Sir Evelyn as he walked alone up the aisle,—anxious, sympathizing eyes,—for it was months since he had been seen there, and the steadfast look of sorrow on his face told how he had suffered. As he knelt in his own corner, and saw the little Prayer-book unused, beside his own, and the very footstool on which Willy had always been accustomed to stand, he was very near breaking down again. Ah, not one in that old church but missed the fair child they had so long been used to see there, ever at his brother’s side; often indeed encircled by his arm, with his golden head and sweet, serious eyes: not a heart but ached for “the one that was left” standing alone there now.

Before Christmas Sir Evelyn returned to the Towers; Lady Cairne and her daughter went to visit some friends; and once more Alliston was silent and deserted. Part of the early spring he spent in Scotland, and then returned home again. But Lady Rythesdale would not let him be long there. It so happened, that this year his own house in town was undergoing extensive repairs and alterations, so she persuaded him to come to them for part of the season at least. He did not

seem to care, at present, for going about as usual, and they let him have his own way entirely,—to go out or remain at home, as he best liked,—which was the kindest as well as the wisest plan. He generally preferred being with Lady Rythesdale herself, though gossips asserted that the society of his beautiful young cousin,—Lady Ida Liscombe,—was not without its special attractions! However, that might be, he was constantly his aunt's cavalier and escort, and her companion in her leisure hours. A peculiar tie seemed to bind him to her, dating from that time of his first great sorrow, when she had most supplied his mother's place. Sometimes even now, as in his boyish days, he would sit on a low seat beside her; and as her fingers strayed, as of yore, through his dark curls, they would talk of those long-ago times, and sometimes, but not often, of Willy! His sweet memory was enshrined in his brother's heart of hearts: he could not often bring himself to mention him. So the days passed, and June had come round again.

"I see there is a Concert at Rythesdale House, advertised for next week, mamma," said Julia Forrester, one morning at breakfast; "and all the best singers are to be there. I should like to go very much: there are some half-guinea tickets to be had."

"I am quite willing, my dear; especially as you were disappointed about going to the Opera last week. Which day is it?"

"Wednesday. We have no engagement, so Percival had better see after the tickets directly, hadn't he?"

"How many shall you want?" demanded that young gentleman, busily employed in cutting infinitesimally thin slices of ham.

"Why, there will be mamma and me: Lotty won't go, of course, because of her throat; so that will be two, at any rate."

"And how about Marian?" he asked; having noticed the sudden flush on her cheek, when Julia mentioned Rythesdale House, though he little guessed the cause.

"Oh, she may go if she likes!" said Mrs. Forrester: "but I don't think it will be much amusement to her."

"And of course your 'humble servant,' as escort," said Percival, before May could reply. "Eh, mother?"

"Well, yes: we can hardly do without you. So you must get four tickets."

Why was it that May looked forward so much to that concert? She had never seen any of the Rythesdale family, though she knew all about them; possibly it seemed some slight link with those long ago days that had passed for ever now.

The day came at last. Rythesdale House was a splendid mansion facing Hyde Park: as they drove up under the grand portico, and were ushered into the magnificent entrance hall, May was lost in astonishment and admiration. Up the wide staircase they were conducted, and at last reached the saloons, in the first of which their places were. The softened light, the richly panelled walls and lofty proportions of the room, she thought at first could not be surpassed: but as she looked through the open folding-doors into the one beyond, it seemed like an enchanted region. Exquisite pictures hung on the walls; flowers, statuettes, cabinets, and the choicest treasures of art abounded everywhere. She had never dreamed of anything half so beautiful. Oh, if she could only go in and see it all! There, too,

was the raised dais for the performers; but the room she was in was at right angles with the other, to which, indeed, it was a sort of vestibule, only the end of it was visible. Presently the performers began to arrive, and the concert commenced.

During the interval of a few minutes between the two parts of the performance, Lord and Lady Rythesdale were seen walking together through the rooms, and there was a general turning of heads towards the door by which they had entered. They bowed here and there to those whom they recognized, and then passed on through the folding-doors to where their own special friends were.

Immediately behind them came another couple, on whom all eyes were turned.

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Julia; "did you ever see such a tall, distinguished looking man; and what a lovely girl, too! Who can they be?"

A voice behind replied, "That is a nephew of Lord Rythesdale's, I forget his name; and that is the cousin he is engaged to, Lady Ida Liscombe. Isn't she beautiful? People say they will be the handsomest couple in London."

May turned. Her heart seemed to stand still: no need for her to ask who he was! Her eyes were riveted on the face and form she so well remembered: how exactly the same he looked, except that, surely, there was a shade more gravity over him than there used to be. The same noble bearing and steady eye, nay, the very same graceful bending of his head, towards the fair girl on his arm, that she had seen before: yes, even when he had been speaking to her own little self! A strange feeling came over her, as she noticed her smiling look

up at him in answer to some slight remark. Oh, but she was beautiful! dainty and fair,—a befitting bride for Sir Evelyn Alliston. So tried to think little May as they came nearer.

They were close by now. Would he turn this way, —would he see her? She actually trembled: it would be such a strange time and place for them to meet again. At that moment some one on the opposite side of the room caught his attention; he turned his head, bowed and smiled, and then he and his companion passed on, and were soon lost to sight in the dazzling regions beyond.

Of the last part of the performance May could not have given much of an account; her eyes were bent on her programme: and to Percival Forrester's repeated attempts at conversation she returned, it must be confessed, very short answers.

The next morning at breakfast, Julia was expatiating to her sister on her hero of last evening.

“I never saw such a handsome young man!” she remarked. “There was something so noble and aristocratic-looking about him: he must be a lord or a duke, I’m certain!”

“That was Sir Evelyn Alliston,” said May, in a low voice, feeling it impossible for her to remain silent. “He is a nephew of Lord Rythesdale’s.”

“Alliston!” repeated Edith. “Why, is it *the* Sir Evelyn,—Willy’s big brother, that you have told me about?”

“Yes,” said May, colouring, and vexed with herself that she could not help it.

“Dear me!” remarked Charlotte: “if you knew him so well, I wonder he did not recognise you.”

"He did not see me," was the quiet reply, "or I am sure he would have spoken."

"Don't be too sure of that: people are not always so ready to see their country acquaintances in the height of the London season!"

"He was too much engrossed with his 'lady love' to see anyone," observed Julia. "She is lovely Charlotte,—one of the Lady Liscombes."

Just then Mrs. Forrester entered the room, and the conversation dropped.

For some days after this, it seemed to May as if it were more difficult than usual to concentrate her thoughts and energies upon her daily round of duties: thoughts of that evening would intrude, and visions of the bright future of Sir Evelyn's chosen bride made the contrast of her own life seem more dreary. Charlotte's words often recurred to her, and yet she chided herself for trying to think there was nothing in them. Was it not most probable, that if by any chance she did meet him again he would not remember her; or if he did, merely as the passing acquaintance of "long ago"? She did wonder a little if ever she should see him: he was in London, certainly; but how unlikely it seemed. She never went out at fashionable hours, or to fashionable places; and the season was fast passing now.

July had come; the weather was hot and sultry: everyone who could was rushing away from London. The Forresters (with the exception of Mr. Forrester, his eldest son, and Julia, who had started for a long-talked-of trip to Switzerland) went to the sea-side as usual. May was thankful for the change: the fresh breezes seemed like new life to her, after the stifling air of London. The place was full of visitors. Edith

had many companions, with whom she constantly spent the afternoon, and then May was free to do as she chose. She would take a book and wander away along the sands to some sheltered nook among the rocks, and there sit and muse in tranquil enjoyment. One day she had walked rather farther than usual, and was sitting, gazing out over the sea, lost in dreamy thought, when she suddenly became aware of someone being close beside her. She looked up, and her eyes met those of Sir Evelyn Alliston ! With a little cry she started up, hardly believing that her sight served her truly.

“ Miss Leslie ! ” he exclaimed, as he warmly shook hands with her : “ is it possible ? I beg your pardon, though,” he added, hurriedly. “ Not ‘ Miss Leslie ’ now, I imagine.”

She looked at him, wonderingly.

“ Am I so much changed then, Sir Evelyn, that you don’t remember me ! I am Marian Leslie, indeed.”

“ But I was told,—I understood that you had changed your name,” he replied, a little hesitatingly : “ very soon, in fact, after you left Alliston.”

“ Oh, no ! ” she said, but found no more words : the swift colour and falling eye told him something of the truth nevertheless.

“ I was misinformed then,” was the quiet reply, as he gazed at the downcast face, with its child-like brow and timid, changing hues, so exactly as he remembered it.

But there was,—or May fancied there was,—a slight change in his voice when he spoke again.

“ You soon forgot Alliston, Miss Leslie. I know I had no right to expect otherwise ; and yet there was one I thought you would not have forgotten so soon.”

“ Oh, why should you say that, Sir Evelyn ! ” she

exclaimed, with filling eyes. "How I have thought and longed to know all about him. It was only by the newspaper, at last, that I heard what had happened."

He did not speak for a moment.

"Ah, he never forgot you: he talked of you to the very last, and wondered why you never answered his little letters."

"Letters!" And she looked up again now. "I never had a single one from him; though I waited and waited so anxiously, and then I thought he must have forgotten me!"

"You never had one!" he repeated, slowly. "And he wrote twice, to my certain knowledge. But if you had only written to him, Miss Leslie, then he would have known."

"I could not—," and she hesitated. "Lady Cairne made me promise, at the last moment, that I would not write till I had heard from him; and I felt so sure of that," she added, with a faint little smile, "that I promised."

"There has been some unfair play here," he said, gravely; and even as he spoke, a suspicion flashed across his mind. "But, oh, how I wish you could have told him this!"

The look that came into his face was too much for May: her own fell again, and she burst into tears.

All shadow of reproach had passed away now, as he stooped down and gently took one of her hands into his own.

"You must not grieve at what I said. Willy never doubted you: he always said he knew you would not forget him, and that it was not your fault."

"Oh, I cannot bear it!" sobbed poor little May. "To

think that I shall never see him again, and that I even seemed to have forgotten him. Why, why did I not know sooner!"

"I wish that had been possible: but, indeed, you must not be unhappy about it any longer."

"But you, Sir Evelyn,—you doubted me!" she murmured, with a somewhat troubled look up at him.

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed, earnestly, as he gently replaced her in her former seat. "It did seem a little strange at first,—you can understand that! But I might have known,—I might have been sure,—that it was not your doing.

"Do you remember this, Miss Leslie?" he asked, presently; and he put into her hands the little book she had given to Willy. "It was his constant companion latterly, and he told me to give it back to you if ever I saw you again; but I feel, somehow, as if I could not part with it. Will you let me keep it now? I have learned to love and value it almost as much as Willy did!"

What a look of joy flashed through her tears.

"Oh, yes: keep it! Keep it always, Sir Evelyn: it seems to belong more to you than to me. Oh, I can never tell you," she continued, brokenly, "how much I thought of you then! I knew what you must have gone through in losing him."

"Yes," he replied, in a low, changed tone: "it seemed as if part of my very self were gone. I cannot speak of him to people in general; but you knew and loved him, and you were one of the very few that he could talk to of the things he loved best: if I had only understood them sooner! Oh, if I had my darling back again I should be one with him now, as I never was before!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed May, involuntarily. "How he would rejoice to know."

"Perhaps he does: I like to think it is so. I know it is in answer to all his prayers for me that the change has come. My dear child!" he murmured, and his head was bowed as he spoke. But his grief had lost its bitterness now: he knew and loved the hand that had stricken him, and could rejoice in the sweet assurance that the Saviour Willy had loved and trusted, was his own now,—that in Him they were indeed *one* for evermore!

For some minutes both were silent, and then they talked of him again; and Sir Evelyn went on in low tones to tell her of the last cloudless days of the little one they had both loved so well: it seemed to soothe him to talk to her. The time passed, they hardly knew how.

"There are one or two little things that he left for you," he said, presently. "I have got them all safely; and I added one memento myself that I know you will value. When shall I see you again? I could not trust them in any hands but your own."

They were walking slowly back again now, in the direction of the town.

"We shall be here for several weeks longer, I believe," replied May. "If you would not mind the trouble of leaving them for me, we are at No. 6, West Cliff Terrace."

"And you find London life very different from what you feared?" he asked, presently: "at least, I should imagine so from what aunt Cairne said."

"What was that?" inquired his companion, rather breathlessly.

He told her the glowing colours in which her London surroundings had been painted, and that that was the alleged reason of her speedy forgetfulness of Alliston. But gradually he drew from her something of the real state of affairs, different, indeed, from what he had supposed.

"But I am trying to get used to it," she remarked, innocently. "Only I do get sometimes such a longing for the real country! But do you know, Sir Evelyn, this is not the first time I have seen you lately. I was close to you once before, but you did not see me."

His astonishment was great: and then as she went on to explain, a remembrance of that conversation she had overheard recurred to her, she seemed to have forgotten it in their talk of old days.

There was a plain gold locket hanging to his chain now, too, that she had never observed before: no doubt as to who was contained in that, she thought.

"I am with the Rythesdales again here," he said; "but they are going on to Torquay soon."

"Why there he is at last!" exclaimed a merry young voice at that moment. "Well, Evelyn, you do keep your appointments famously: the horses were coming round as we left, and papa was calling for you."

What a bright vision met May Leslie's quick look as she turned towards the speaker! She had been so absorbed in her talk with Sir Evelyn, that she had not noticed that they were nearing the inhabited world again. The fresh wind had tinted Lady Ida's cheek with unusual bloom, and as she raised her happy eyes to his she laughed merrily at his look of dismay.

"You don't mean that it is five o'clock!" he ejaculated, taking out his watch. "Well, you must let me

introduce Miss Leslie to you, aunt Helen ; and then I will be off," and he turned to Lady Rythesdale, who was with her daughter, and who had been eyeing rather curiously the fair sweet face at her nephew's side.

"I have heard of you before, Miss Leslie," she said, instantly holding out her hand ; "so I hardly feel as if you were a stranger."

May was a little startled : what could she have heard about her ?

Sir Evelyn had disappeared ; and now as they walked on Lady Rythesdale was so kind and pleasant, and Lady Ida so friendly, that she almost felt as if they were old friends. She could not help looking at the latter ; her face had been imprinted on her memory since that night,—she would have known her anywhere ; and now, with the additional charm of her graceful manner, she more and more understood Sir Evelyn's choice.

Once as the young bride elect pulled off her glove to gather some seaweed, May noticed the splendid ring that sparkled on that third finger of her left hand. How happy, oh, how happy she must be ! was her involuntary thought. When they parted Lady Rythesdale expressed a hope that they should meet again : would she come and lunch with them some day ? and she told her their address. May thanked her gratefully, but she had not much hope of being allowed to go.

"Certainly not !" was Mrs. Forrester's reply, when she timidly preferred her request. "I wonder at your asking, Marian, when Edith was out all yesterday, and you know how her lessons have been neglected lately. Besides," she added, inadvertently letting out the real

reason, "I have no idea of your going there in that way; Lady Rythesdale might have called upon me if she had wished to become acquainted with us properly."

"Yes," remarked Charlotte, amiably; "and if Sir Evelyn Alliston is with his fiancée there, how pleasant it would be for you to be the third person, which you certainly would be, as you don't know the others."

May said no more; but she wrote a little note to Lady Rythesdale, and posted it herself that very evening.

It was with somewhat mingled feelings that she looked back upon that day when she retired to her own little room for the night. Again she had seen those two together, and sincerely she tried to rejoice in their happiness; a weary little pain was at her heart, nevertheless: whence it came, she did not care to analyse, but she knew where it might be laid to rest; albeit it was but a sigh that was breathed to heaven whose burden could not even to herself be put into words.

The next afternoon it happened that she had to come up from the sands for the second volume of the book she was reading. No one was in the house just then.

"There's been a gentleman inquiring for you, Miss," said Bridget, the little lodging-house servant: "but I said you was out, and he gave me a parcel for you; and I was to give it to no one else, so it's in your room now."

"May hurried up; fearful lest in her absence it might have fallen into other hands; but there it was, on the dressing-table. It contained two books that had been special favourites with Willy, and a little

crystal seal with the words "For ever," engraved upon it. There was besides a closed envelope addressed in a handwriting she at once recognised. She opened it, and as she did so a beautiful golden curl twined round her fingers; the tears started to her eyes, so vividly did it recall that fair childish face and form. Presently she went to her desk, and taking out a small box she opened it with a certain tiny key that always hung to her watch-chain. There lay a rather singular collection: two withered roses, a faded spray of Cape jessamine, a small scrap of paper, the writing on which bore a strong resemblance to that on the envelope,—though it only seemed notes of the arrival and departure of trains between London and Alliston, roughly jotted down.

Ah, little May, we will not look too closely at you now, as you take up the little relics one by one, and replace them tenderly.

"Why do I keep them now?" she murmured to herself; but she laid the little seal and the fair curl beside them, shut and locked the box, and soon after went downstairs.

Edith was safely disposed of with some companions that afternoon; and May seeing that the sands were becoming very crowded, turned up a quiet looking road, that looked as if it might lead into some fields at last. She had not gone far when she perceived two figures approaching, one of whom she instantly recognised as Lady Ida Liscombe, evidently attended by her maid. She hardly thought she would remember her; but as they met, Lady Ida exclaimed,—

"Oh, Miss Leslie, is it you! Have you found out this walk, too?"

"No," replied May, warming at once to the cordial

manner of her new friend: "I never was here before. I was only trying to find some quiet place where I could sit down and read."

"There is a lovely place just inside that gate, with a felled tree for a seat: let us go and try it, shall we? You can go on Norris, if you like," she added, turning to her maid; "I know you will be in a hurry to get home, and I shall have a companion now."

Norris obeyed; and the two girls seated themselves comfortably in the pleasant shade.

"The sands get so crowded," observed Lady Ida, "that I never care to be there all day; and I felt as if I should like a real country walk this afternoon,—so as mamma and Constance were out driving, I got leave to come. It isn't often they will spare me now," she added, with a smile.

May looked up inquiringly.

"Ah, I forgot you did not know. But I shall have to leave them altogether before very long. I am to be married this year,—at least, so somebody says: and *then* you know—" she did not finish her sentence, but the happy face spoke for itself.

"I heard a rumour of that sometime ago," returned her companion, trying to speak just as usual. "I heard it in London; besides I could not help seeing something the other day when you took your gloves off to gather that red sea-weed, that made me quite sure. What a beautiful ring it was!"

"Yes," replied Lady Ida, showing it to her: "it is my own choice. I always said if I were ever engaged I should like a ruby and diamond heart;" and she looked at it lovingly. "But I have something here that I value even more: would you like to look at it?"

She unclasped from her throat a jewelled locket on which the initials "E. A." were entwined with her own.

For one moment May felt as if she would rather not look. Was not that face engraved somewhere more indelibly than in the most perfect of minatures? Lady Ida opened it and laid it in her hand. She started!

"This!" she exclaimed, involuntarily.

Instead of the dark, grave handsome features she had expected to recognise; a bright face, with laughing blue eyes and curling flaxen moustaches, met her bewildered gaze.

"Who is it?" she murmured at last. "I cannot understand." Lady Ida laughed merrily.

"Why, Miss Leslie, you look as if you had seen an apparition! That is Lord Anstruther,—my fiancé," she added, in a lower tone, a slight flush overspreading her face. "I thought you knew—"

"Yes: but I thought,—I had heard—" stammered May, "that you were engaged to your cousin,—to—to—Sir Evelyn Alliston!"

"Oh, how amusing! Then that report has reached you too. Oh, dear no: I love dear old Evelyn as if he were my brother, but as to marrying him,—why I am as afraid of him as possible! He has become so dreadfully grave lately: I am sure he thinks me sadly giddy and wild."

May was silent. How very strange it all seemed, and yet as she gazed at the beautiful face beside her, she almost wondered at Sir Evelyn's impenetrability.

"I heard it mentioned in London as such a certainty," she remarked at last, "that I never doubted it for a moment."

"Yes: we were several times congratulated about each other in town this season; but the only person I ever allowed to be taken in about it was that odious Lady Cairne. Oh, I forgot though," she exclaimed: "Lady Cairne is a friend of your's, isn't she?"

"Why, no," was the quiet reply; "not much of a friend I think. What did she say to it?"

"Oh, she was wonderfully chagrined, though she tried not to show it. I believe she thought he meant to marry her daughter, but she changed her ground most cleverly, and said she had known of our engagement for a long time, just with an air as if she had been Sir Evelyn's confidante, you know. She was charmingly taken in, I must say, though we had to undeceive her at last."

"How very amusing!" laughed May: "I can so fancy it. Do you know where she is now?"

"In town, somewhere, I believe. She comes occasionally to look after her 'dear Evelyn.'" And Lady Ida mimicked her peculiar tone. "But you know mamma and she never did take much to each other; and as for Evelyn, I am sure he is getting quite tired of her. I do wish he would marry," she continued, energetically: "he would be so much happier; wouldn't he?"

May found no reply to that; but they chatted on about all sorts of things, till at last it was time to return. Just as they reached the town the carriage overtook them. It was getting rather late, so Lady Ida had to take a somewhat hurried leave of her new friend and join her mother and sister.

The next day was wet: the rain poured down in torrents, so there was no going out for anyone. By

the papers the morning after, May saw that the Rythesdales had all left. She had never even seen Sir Evelyn since that first time. How often she thought over that interview, and now most likely she should never see him again. Well, she was very thankful, at any rate, that she had had an opportunity of explaining several things to him; for she would not have liked him to think her ungrateful for all his old kindness to her!

"Your grand friends did not see so very much of you after all," remarked Charlotte Forrester, that same evening. "I see they have all left to-day."

"Yes," was the quiet reply: "I hardly expected to see them again, for I knew they were leaving soon."

"Ah, 'tuft hunting' never answers!" continued Charlotte. "Those sort of people are civil enough just when it suits them; but they are not to be depended on: it always means nothing."

"Whatever they mean," returned May, rather hotly, "I have never met with such real kindness as I have from them in my whole life. I only wish"....

But she checked herself, and almost directly left the room.

"Dear me," exclaimed Miss Forrester, "how very hoity-toity we are getting about our titled acquaintances! I'll tell you what, mamma," she added, determined now to speak out on a subject she had long meditated; "I think it would be a very good thing if we could get rid of Marian now: she is growing so very grand in her notions, just because these people have spoken to her. She ought to find her own level, and go somewhere where she would not be spoiled and petted as she has been with you; besides, it would be the

making of Edith if she could go to school here, at the sea."

It may be remarked that Miss Forrester had latterly become more and more jealous of May. Her refined beauty and winning grace had often caused her to become, though most unconsciously, a very decided rival; and she noticed impatiently the undisguised looks of admiration that fell upon her,—instead of herself,—when they happened to be out together. Her jealous dislike increased daily. Mrs. Forrester entirely agreed with her daughter, but there were difficulties in the way.

"I think it would be a first-rate plan, my dear; but what would your father say? I don't believe he would ever consent."

"Oh, yes: mamma! We could manage it beautifully now that he is away. You could write and say that Dr. Russell strongly recommends sea air for Edith, and that you have heard of a nice school for her. And after all you need not lose sight of Marian, for I'll tell you what I've just thought of," she added, energetically. "You remember that nice Mrs. Vincent, in Chester Square, who spoke to you about a governess for her little girls: that would be just the very thing for her. She would be as happy as a queen there, and quite close to us. Do let us write, at all events."

Mrs. Forrester, although with many misgivings, allowed the letter to be sent, and herself wrote to her husband. By return of post came a letter from Mrs. Vincent, saying that she would like to have an interview with Miss Leslie, whose appearance and manner had already pre-possessed her, though they had only met once. Could she come up to town on the following

Thursday, to 18, Chester Square? If they agreed upon terms, etc., she could stay then and there; if not, she would be glad for her to stay for the night, and she could return to Mrs. Forrester's the next day.

All this was very satisfactory, and Charlotte rejoiced at the success of her plan. Mrs. Forrester was considerably relieved at the quiet way in which May received the announcement of the change that awaited her: she had expected a scene; but probably her own conscience upbraided her more than she liked to own for thus casting out on the world the orphan child of her once loved friend. In her better moments she half repented; but Charlotte's influence with her mother was great,—besides, anything in the shape of a rival to the interests of her own children must be removed at any cost. May herself could not feel any great sorrow at leaving. Her life had not been a particularly happy one; and though she would not have chosen to encounter another entrance among strangers, still she felt she could not possibly remain where she was no longer wanted. She knew too that all *was* right,—all ordered for her in love and wisdom beyond her own.

Edith was at first loud in her lamentations; but Charlotte drew such vivid pictures of the delights of school life at the sea-side, that gradually she became reconciled.

CHAPTER XIX.

“The moments are past and her fears are at rest,
Like a beautiful dream joy steals o'er her breast ;
While the planet above and the quiet blue sea
Are pledged to his love and his constancy !”

ON the Tuesday of this week there was to be a large pic-nic given by some friends of the Forresters, to which they were all invited, Edith included.

“I daresay I could get you an invitation, Marian, if you wished it,” Mrs. Forrester had said ; “but I thought as it was your last day but one, you would be busy, and would not care to go.”

May said she much preferred staying behind. She was glad of one undisturbed day in which to take a quiet leave of some of her favourite haunts : one or two of them endeared by strangely pleasant memories ! After her solitary dinner she went upstairs to get ready. Her simple toilette was completed by two or three lovely flowers that Edith had given her the day before, which she fastened in her dress, just making a radiant spot of colour where it was needed, and then she sallied forth.

“My !” exclaimed Bridget, as she passed, “whatever some folks does to themselves I can’t make out ! She looks as beautiful as a princess to-day !”

Bridget’s were not the only admiring eyes that

followed May that afternoon. But she walked on quite unconscious of them, feeling very sober, if the truth must be told; for though there were no strong ties to break in leaving the Forresters, still it seemed as if the only semblance of a home were passing away now.

She had not gone very far, when she suddenly looked up and saw a figure on the other side the street which actually made her heart give a great leap. Surely she must be mistaken. But no: Sir Evelyn Alliston was crossing over, and in another minute had shaken hands with her. He did not speak at first: possibly the very fair vision that met his eye was more than even he had looked for.

“Which way are you going, if I may venture to ask, Miss Leslie?” he said, then.

“I was only going down to the sands. All the others are away at a pic-nic; but this is my last day here but one, so I did not care to go: I wanted to have a good farewell of the sea.”

He had turned, and was quietly walking back with her in the direction of the shore.

“Your last day, did you say? I thought I understood that you would be here for several weeks longer?”

“Yes: Mrs. Forrester and her daughters will; but I am leaving them. They do not want me for Edith any longer, so I am going to live with another lady.”

He looked at her, inquiringly.

“Pardon me: how do you mean? Are you going back to your friend in Scotland, that you once told me of?”

“No, Sir Evelyn,” she replied, flushing, and speaking with some difficulty. “I am going to be a governess. I have no home, you see,” she added, simply; “so it

has happened, very opportunely, that a friend of Mrs. Forrester's should just now be in want of one."

Her companion was absolutely silent for a moment. The look on his face almost made her think she had unwittingly offended him; but his next words quite set her at rest again. They were just in his usual tone.

"How beautiful that purple line of shadow is across the water!"

"It is," she replied. "I have noticed it several times."

They walked on past the place where he had first found her that other time they met, and then, under the shadow of a huge projecting rock, she was permitted to rest at last. For some minutes they stood silently watching the changing lights and shadows on the summer sea. No one was near them; only now and then a sea-bird would pass swiftly, with its strange wild cry.

"I thought you had left, Sir Evelyn," said May, at last. "I saw Lady Rythesdale's departure in the paper some days ago."

"Yes," he replied, with a rather singular look at her, "I had: but I found I had left something behind me here that I did not wish to lose, hopelessly; so I came back again."

"And have you found it?" she asked, with innocent interest.

"It certainly is not in my own possession now, Miss Leslie, if that is what you mean. Supposing," he continued, rather suddenly,—"supposing I were to ask *your* help in the matter, what would you say?"

"Oh, yes!" was the eager reply. "Anything I can I will gladly do. What is it?"

"And if it involved a piece of very decided trust in me, would you still be willing?"

His voice was somewhat moved and changed. May looked up at him.

"Why, yes, Sir Evelyn," she replied, in a very child's tone. "Do you think that I would not?"

"I did not mean to imply that," he said, very gently, noticing the flush that overspread her face; "but,—I may as well tell you at once,—do you know that it all depends on you, Miss Leslie, whether I go back a poorer, or an immeasurably richer man than when I came!"

Her heart beat fast. Her hands clasped each other nervously; but she could not speak.

"Yes," he continued, low. "I shall soon be going back to Alliston: and it is a dreary home to me now. Tell me," and the tone grew intense in its earnestness: "must I go back alone?"

One swift inquiring upward glance she gave; but the look that met her's was unmistakable in its meaning. Her head drooped again. Sir Evelyn had to bend low to catch the almost whispered reply; but apparently it satisfied him, for she was drawn into his arms then, and clasped close, as he murmured, "My own at last!"

Silently still she stood: such a glow of new strange happiness growing up around her as almost seemed to her like a dream.

"When will you speak to me again?" he said, presently, raising the downcast face, and gazing into the shy eyes that were half veiled still. "Have you found out now what it was that I had so irrecoverably lost here?"

In lovely bewildered confusion she stood before him.

"Oh, how little I knew what you meant!" she stammered. "How could you?"

"How could I what?" he asked, laughing. "How could I ask you to help me? Well, you see now how useless it would have been to have asked anyone else!"

"Oh, but you mustn't say so, Sir Evelyn! I am afraid: I am, indeed!" she hesitated

"What are you afraid of? I can't have you fear anything now that you have given me the right to take care of you."

"Ah, that is the very thing!" and her voice trembled. "I hardly know how to say it: but I am afraid you will not find me what you expect. I know so little of the ways of the world, and am so inexperienced. I am afraid lest you should be disappointed in me!"

But the answer she got to that silenced her effectually.

"Child," he whispered, presently, "that was the very thing that drew me to you, the very thing I have been longing for. I am tired of the world and its emptiness. I wanted something fresh and sweet, like—like your flowers there," he added, as he looked down at them; their delicate purity seeming in his eyes no unfit emblem of the fair young girl, in the tender dawn of her early womanhood, who was standing beside him now. "There was something else too," he added, lower, "more precious to me even than that: I know our love will not be for this life only."

"Oh, no," she murmured: "that is the happiest thought of all!" and then it seemed instinctively the hearts of each turned towards Willy.

"Ah, if he had but known of this," said his brother, presently, "how he would have rejoiced!" and then there was a pause.

"What will Lady Cairne say!" exclaimed May, at

last, as if she had been going over the subject very busily, and the words escaped her almost unawares.

"I think she will be rather astonished," replied Sir Evelyn, in an amused tone. "But she has always known that her home with me could be but a temporary one,—that when another Lady Alliston appeared she must resign."

Lady Alliston! How strangely it sounded. Was it possible that she, little May Leslie, was really to become his wife, and call the princely house she so well remembered "home!"

She did not reply, but stood gazing out over the sea. Sir Evelyn gazed at something nearer.

"And how soon will my little sunbeam be willing to redeem her promise?" he asked, presently. "I see no reason for delay. What does she say?"

Again the quick half-timid glance was raised to his; but she hid her face once more on his breast, as she whispered,—

"Just as you wish: I have no one but you now."

His thanks were given tenderly, even before he spoke.

"My darling, how shall I reward you! But I long so to have my treasure in my own safe keeping that you must forgive me. What is the shortest possible time I must allow you for the wonderful preparations that ladies seem to think so all-important on these occasions,—and which, by the way, aunt Rythesdale made me promise to let her superintend,—provided, of course, that I succeeded in what I came back for."

How the roses blossomed now.

"Lady Rythesdale! Did she know: and what did she say?"

"She gave me her blessing with all her heart, from the first moment she saw you, and indeed a little before."

"But how could she?" exclaimed May, involuntarily.

"Oh, what a child it is!" laughed Sir Evelyn, fondly. "How long do you suppose it is since the idea first presented itself to me, or how long ago I should have spoken, if that report had not stopped me, eh?"

But he got no answer to that. The sea murmured on, its low dreamy song, while in each heart was whispering that strange sweet joy that comes to us but once in a life time. The parting had to come at last, nevertheless, for Sir Evelyn had to catch the last train that would take him back that night.

"Aunt Rythesdale wants to have entire possession of you till she makes you over into my hands, so I shall have you again in two days, little woman," he whispered, as he held her close. "But I hardly know how to let you go."

They walked back together; and it was settled that as Lady Rythesdale was leaving Torquay for London the very day May had fixed for her journey thither, they should meet at the station and go on together to Rythesdale House. How different a destination to what she had anticipated but a few hours ago! She was to write to Mrs. Vincent, of course; but Sir Evelyn made her promise to say nothing to the Forresters till she was safely away: even now he seemed half-fearful lest anything should come to rob him of his treasure.

And then he was gone. May watched him till he was out of sight: his tall figure distinguishable as usual above all others. But what a thought it was that he belonged to her now,—that nothing could ever separate them

again,—that the treasure of his great love was her own for evermore! For the rest of the way home she felt as if she trod on air: never had the sunset glory seemed so beautiful,—never did all nature look so lovely in her eyes. When she reached her own little room everything looked so familiar, it seemed impossible to believe that such a change had been wrought in her whole life since she went out that afternoon. Instinctively the sweet burden of her new-found happiness was laid at the feet of Him who had been the tender guide of her youthful days: sweeter and happier too as coming from His hand.

The Forresters returned rather late. They were tired and somewhat out of sorts, withal. Perhaps the day had not entirely answered their expectations: possibly something in May's unconsciously happy face irritated Charlotte, for she was unusually spiteful and exacting that evening. But it all fell off from little May as dew from a rose-leaf: such a spring of new pure joy was within. And what an awakening it was next morning. Who does not know that first half-confused feeling, whether of joy or sorrow, that comes to us when any great crisis of our life has passed. Could it really be to her that such brightness had come!

That day she was busy with packing. Little had she dreamed when she put those things together under what circumstances she should return.

Edith was by turns loud in her lamentations at parting from her dear Marian, and eager in her anticipations of the joys of school life. After she had gone to bed, Mrs. Forrester delivered herself of a little moral lecture, by which it is hoped her hearer duly profited.

“I hope you will be happy in your new home,

Marian," she said ; " but you must not expect it to be such as you have had with us."

" I do not in the least," replied May simply, without raising her eyes from her work.

" I've no doubt Mrs. Vincent will be very kind to you, and let you come and see us, sometimes ; but, of course, you won't be treated like one of the family, as you have been here. It is well to be prepared, for a great change in our circumstances often takes us by surprise otherwise."

" It does indeed !" was the quick reply. But what a bound her heart gave at the words, and what a happy smile curled the corners of her mouth ; though she was bending too low for anyone else to see it.

" By the way, what time do you start in the morning ? " pursued Mrs. Forrester. " I forgot to ask you before."

" The train leaves at eleven something,—I think ten minutes past."

" Oh, then," exclaimed Charlotte, " we must do as I said, mamma : it will never do to keep the Egertons waiting ! "

" I am afraid not. Our friends, the Egertons, want us to go with them to Valehead in the morning, so I am afraid, my dear Marian, we shall not be able to see you off, as we start at ten ; but you will not mind that, as you will have to travel alone all day."

" Not in the least : pray don't think of me ; I shall do perfectly well." And then they said " Good night :" Mrs. Forrester trying to feel satisfied that she had done everything that could possibly be required of her.

The next morning she and her daughters set off at ten ; taking leave of May very much in the manner

that might have been expected. Edith clung tearfully to her at the last, but was impatiently called away by her sister, as the carriage was waiting.

When they were gone, May completed her preparations; gave a book and a few kind words to Bridget, whose heart she had completely won, and then said "Good bye" to good Mrs. Burrowes, the land-lady. The latter was quite motherly in her care of her; commenting in no measured terms on the want of feeling shown by Mrs. Forrester and her daughters, in letting "that pretty young creature go off by herself; shame on them: for she's worth the whole lot of them put together, any day! Jemmy, my boy," she added, "just you run down to the station, and be ready to see to Miss Leslie's luggage: I'll give you sixpence when you come back."

Jemmy set off, nothing loth; possibly something in the face and voice that thanked him was a greater incentive than even his mother's sixpence! May felt a little anxious as they neared the station. Supposing the two she was expecting to meet her there should have missed in any way: what should she do then? But as she reached the door she saw Sir Evelyn waiting; for the train was just in. How wonderful it seemed, that he should be waiting for *her*,—that she should have a sort of right in him now, to be taken care of and looked after!

His greeting was all that it could be under the circumstances; for the platform was crowded, and there was no time for many words. He took her at once to Lady Rythesdale, whose kind, almost motherly, welcome was doubly sweet, after the coldness of those she had left.

The journey was a very different thing to her from

any she had had lately; the surrounding of love and care strangely new and sweet. Lady Rythesdale was soon amiably absorbed in her book, and took no apparent notice of her companions.

Meanwhile Jemmy Burrowes had returned home, perfectly wild with delight at being the possessor of a whole half-sovereign, that Sir Evelyn had given him when he discovered on whose service he had come.

"Oh, mother," he cried, "look what I've got!"

"Why, my boy, there must be a mistake: it can't be for you."

"Yes: the gentleman gave it me hisself, and thanked me for taking care of Miss Leslie's things: she was with him then."

"Whoever can he be, now?" soliloquised Mrs. Burrowes: "I'm glad though, anyhow, as she had some one to take care of her."

"There was another lady too," pursued Jemmy; "and they both seemed to be taking care of Miss Leslie: she was looking so happy like. And when they got into the train, mother, there were two men waiting on them; one in black, and the other's coat was all over beautiful gold buttons and yellow lace."

All this, with sundry embellishments of her own, did Mrs. Burrowes retail into the astonished ears of Mrs. Forrester and her daughter when they returned: she retired perfectly satisfied with the result of her communications.

It was not till the next morning, however, that their amazement reached its climax. A letter, with a coronet on the seal, and dated from Rythesdale House, in a handwriting utterly unknown to Mrs. Forrester, awaited her on the breakfast table. Sir Evelyn wrote himself,

and enclosed a few lines from May, announcing their engagement, and intended marriage at the end of the month.

The exclamations, the dismay, the bewilderment that ensued, words are powerless to depict. For once in her life Mrs. Forrester felt that she had been signally mistaken! One more surprise, however, was in reserve.

It happened that Percival Forrester was coming down that week, from Saturday till Monday, as he had done on several former occasions. He knew, of course, that May was leaving; but was, on the whole, rather glad than otherwise. He was a great friend of Mrs. Vincent's, and knew he would have more opportunities of seeing her in peace there than at home.

"Where is Marian?" he asked, presently, when he had been in the house sometime, and she had not appeared.

"Haven't you heard?" exclaimed his sister. "She is gone."

"Gone already! You surely did not let her travel up alone?"

"Read that," said Mrs. Forrester, and she put Sir Evelyn's letter into his hand. He read the first half dozen lines,—

"Oh, mother," he exclaimed, in a tone of anguish, "you should have told me this before!" his head sank into his hands as he spoke.

"Percival, my dear boy, what do you mean? Surely you were not in earnest when you pretended to care for her,—for Marian?"

"I shall never care for anyone else," he groaned. "But I knew,—I knew she was too good for me. She told me it was no use; but like a fool I have gone on

hoping, hoping. Oh, my little Marian!" he murmured, brokenly, "how can I give you up?" He started from his seat as he spoke, and hastily leaving the room was seen no more that night.

The feelings of the other two reached their climax then, especially as Mrs. Forrester recalled a certain conversation she had once had with May concerning her son.

Surely her unloving conduct towards the orphan girl had recoiled on herself now with tenfold vengeance!

CHAPTER XX.

"The maiden's dimpled cheek
At that loved voice still deeper glows :
The quivering lips in vain would seek
To hide the bliss her eyes disclose."

As May reached the grand entrance of Rythesdale House, it struck her that she had once before entered that very portico and passed up that same magnificent staircase. Little had she then dreamed that next time it would be as the affianced bride of almost a son of the house! Dinner was served in the library; for as they were only to be in town for three or four days, the saloons were not thrown open.

The next morning Lady Rythesdale took possession of her, directly after breakfast, for a long day's shopping; telling Sir Evelyn, who was looking rather disconsolate, that he must amuse himself as best he could, and expect to see nothing more of her till dinner-time! They had a busy day. Lord and Lady Rythesdale had insisted on supplying the "trousseau," exactly as if she were a daughter of their own; and a very dainty and beautiful one it promised to be, for no expense was spared.

In the evening, after dinner, they had adjourned to the boudoir. Lady Rythesdale was called away, and Sir Evelyn had not yet come up. May was standing ~~te~~ among the flowers in the window. She was

dressed simply in white, natural flowers in her hair, and looking perhaps more unconsciously lovely than we have ever seen her look before.

Someone, however, was not unconscious of it. He stood for a moment before he spoke.

"Comparing notes with your namesakes?" he asked, as he came to her side and saw her bending over an exquisite, half-opened rosebud. "Don't ask me which I think the most perfect specimen: I might shock you if I gave my opinion."

The rose tint in the uplifted face well matched that of her dainty rival.

"Why, when did you come in here?" she exclaimed. "I never heard you."

"Not more than half an hour since," he answered, laughing. "But, come here: I want to show you something."

He drew her to a seat beside him as he spoke, and then from a small morocco case he drew a ring, the like of which May had never seen before. It was a plain thick band of gold, with one magnificent brilliant, clear set; and taking her left hand (such a tiny thing it looked in his), on the third finger there presently sparkled the glittering jewel.

"Oh, how beautiful!" was her involuntary exclamation; but her lip trembled, and she added no more, as she drank in all the sweet reminders the action seemed to bring with it. But she raised her head and gave him the only reward he asked for then, and then they sat and talked on till the twilight shadows fell.

The next day Lord Rythesdale and his daughters arrived from Torquay. What a happy party they were! And among them all little May was petted and caressed

in a way that might have spoiled many another; but the long months of quiet patient duty had but served to prepare her for this bright sunshine of love and joy. There was a nameless "something" about her now that added a wondrous tenderness and charm to her exceeding loveliness: they were all delighted with her, and congratulated Evelyn, warmly, on the prize he had won.

On Monday, Lord Liscombe joined them: full of life and spirits as usual. He had never seen May before.

"Why, Evelyn," he exclaimed, when he first found himself alone with him, "what a lucky dog you are! I was fairly dazzled just now: I hardly thought anything mortal could be so perfect."

Evelyn laughed.

"I think you're about right, old fellow; but it strikes me it's as well you didn't see her first: I might have had a dangerous rival."

"Well, as to that, I should have been over head and ears in no time; but as to rivalling *you*," he added, with an admiring look of mock despair at the fine face and figure beside him,—"bah: I don't think my chances would have been worth much!"

Lord Liscombe was still true as ever in his allegiance to his cousin, and henceforth it is not too much to say that his chivalrous devotion to May nearly equalled it.

On the following Thursday they were to leave for the Towers, all but Sir Evelyn, who was obliged to return to Alliston to make various arrangements, preparatory to the great event, and to announce to Lady Cairne the necessity of her departure at last. She was, however, just then away in Scotland; for, not anticipating Evelyn's return for several weeks, she had gone to visit

her sister in Perthshire. Laura had, of course, accompanied her mother, being, for private reasons of her own, nothing loth to visit Stratherne again.

So it fell out that on his arrival at Alliston no one was there. It was a decided relief to him: he felt he could so much more easily write to his aunt than tell her of the coming changes. One of his first visits was to good old Mrs. Humphreys. She had been somewhat ailing lately, and did little else just then than sit in her high-backed chair by the housekeeper's room fire, directing everything still, but not able to trot about quite so briskly as heretofore. Her joy was great at seeing her young master again.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Evelyn, it does my old heart good to see you here once more!" she exclaimed, as he came in. "And how well you're looking too," she added, gazing fondly into his handsome face. "The house seems so empty when you are away."

"I have been away an unconscionable time, certainly," he replied, laughing, as he seated himself beside her; "but I don't think you will have to complain again. I've a piece of news for you, dear old lady, that I wished to be the first to bring you myself. I wonder if it will surprise you! Can you guess?"

"I think I can," she said, rather anxiously. "I saw something in your face when you came in. I knew it must come some time; and it has been my greatest wish for many a day, if only"....

"If only it is some one you approve of, I suppose," laughed Sir Evelyn. "Well, I hope it will be so. You know her, at any rate."

"Oh, no: you don't mean that!" she exclaimed, involuntarily. "I meant if only it was *not* that: but I

ought not to say so. I hope I have not offended you, sir; and I am sure, for your sake, I will try to do my duty by Miss Cairne to the utmost of my power."

"But supposing it is not Miss Cairne?" he replied, in an amused tone. "You must guess again."

The old lady was unutterably relieved: but she tried in vain; after several guesses she was still as far off as ever.

"It is some one who was here once for nearly a week; but that is a long time ago now."

"Oh, it is my dear, beautiful, little Miss May, as I used to call her,—Miss Leslie, I mean!"

She saw that she was right; and clasping his hand in both her own, she exclaimed, through her tears, "God bless you, my dear, and her too! I shall die happy now."

Evelyn was greatly touched. The motherly tenderness of his faithful old nurse was very sweet to him just then.

"But you mustn't talk of dying," he said, soothingly. "You must live many a long year yet, and take care of my dear little wife, as you have done of me."

"Ah, she'll make you a good wife, Mr. Evelyn, depend upon it! She has the fear of the Lord in her heart, and the light of heaven in her sweet eyes. How thankful I am."

"Yes:" he replied, thoughtfully. "By the help of God we shall walk together in the same way, and be helpers to each other. She used to come and see you sometimes when she was here, didn't she?"

"Yes, sir: nearly every day. She and dear little master Willy used to come for a 'talk,' as they called it. How fond he was of her, to be sure!"

"He was. I often think what a joy it would have

been to him to have her for a real sister. Now he is gone, dear child, I feel more than ever thankful for this precious gift."

He then went on to tell her of all his plans, into which she entered with the keenest interest. The old house-steward and Wilson were presently summoned, and a grand consultation held about the necessary festivities that must take place at Alliston in celebration of the auspicious event.

Mr. Randolph dined with Sir Evelyn that evening: it need not be said that his congratulations were sincerely heart-felt. And when the news spread the whole village was astir with joy; for the marriage of their deservedly-beloved young squire had long been the wish of all.

The next day Sir Evelyn wrote to Lady Cairne. The reception of that letter and her reply to it were characteristic.

It has been said that Laura Cairne had her own reasons for wishing to revisit Stratherne. During several former visits there the attentions of the neighbouring "Laird of Inverallan" had been very unmistakable. He was considerably her senior, but as fine a specimen of a noble-looking stalwart Highlander as one could wish to see. She herself inclined to like him, but her mother systematically opposed the idea of giving him any encouragement.

"It is absurd, Laura," she would say, "when you know well enough that every year makes it more and more likely that my one hope for you may be fulfilled. If you had only played your cards well you might have been 'Lady Alliston' long ago: but even now I am quite sure Evelyn likes no one better. We must take

care and be back in good time, though," she added, "to welcome him home. He will want you more than ever now."

But Laura knew perfectly that whatever chances there might once have been, all was for ever over now: gradually, but entirely, the dream of her youth had been relinquished. Since Willy's death she had become much changed and softened; many of the really fine points in her character had developed under the tender influences of that holy time.

One morning it happened that she went out for a walk over the moors with no other companion than her little Skye terrier, who answered well to his name of "Pepper." The day was lovely: the heather fresh and sweet,—not a cloud overhead; and Laura wandered on to a considerable distance before she thought of turning back. Scarcely had she done so when she was overtaken by a huge rough-looking dog, whom Pepper, as his manner was, received rather pugnaciously: in an instant the new comer turned upon him, took him up and shook him like a rat, and would undoubtedly have worried him, had not a stern voice called him off, and a blow from a stout stick sent him yelping a dozen yards off. Laura seized her little favourite in great terror, even before she turned to look for his deliverer.

There stood Inverallan,—astonished: indignant!

"You are not hurt, Miss Cairne, are you?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Not in the least, thank you," she replied. "He did not touch me; but I believe in another moment Pepper would have been killed."

"I'll take care how I bring that brute out again. Keep back, sir," he continued angrily, as the dog with

lowered ears and drooping tail was slouching behind his master. "And yet I don't know,—" and his voice grew softer,—"I don't know that I ought not to feel very grateful to him, for if I had not heard the noise I should certainly have gone round the other side of the hill. How long have you been at Stratherne, may I ask?"

"Nearly a fortnight," replied Laura: "we came the beginning of last week."

"And I only returned home yesterday. If I had but known—"

He was walking back with her all this time; and before she reached home,—though she hardly knew how it all happened,—he had told her the story of his love, and asked her to be his wife!

Her heart said "Yes;" but she said she must ask her mother's consent before anything could be settled between them; and with this answer he was obliged to be satisfied. When they parted, she thought of his long patient waiting, and believed that he would make her happy; she longed too, for a home of her own, and felt that she should like nothing better than to pass her life among those wild moors and grand old mountains, for she had loved the Highlands always. She found her mother and aunt just returned from a visit to the manse, and while they were telling her about it, the English letters came in: one for Lady Cairne.

"Dear me," she exclaimed, as she recognised the writing, and observed the postmark: "Evelyn has come home already! I said he would be sending for us directly: but I wish I had known sooner."

She had only read a few lines when the letter dropped from her hands. With a sudden cry she started up,

and covering her face burst into a passion of angry tears, pouring out in a breath torrents of invective against Evelyn, vehement reproaches of Laura, and bitter regrets at the defeat of all her hopes and plans. Fortunately her sister had left the room ; Laura took up the letter, and at once saw the reason of this strange outbreak. Lady Cairne was walking about the room, wringing her hands, saying no one ever was so unfortunate as she ; her home to be broken up again, and all her own child's doing too !

“Hush, mamma !” said Laura, laying her hand on her arm and gently forcing her into her chair again. “Don’t let aunt Lucy hear you : you know what you are saying about me is unjust. I have told you all along that Evelyn cared for me only as a cousin. We ought to be very glad, after all his kindness to us, that he has found someone who will make him happy.”

“Happy, indeed !” echoed Lady Cairne. “That’s all very fine talking ; but where shall we get such a home again as Alliston, I should like to know ? You’ll soon find the difference I can tell you,—not,” she added excitedly,—“not that I would ever enter the doors again with *that* little creature mistress there !”

“Listen, mamma,” said Laura, earnestly, “and don’t make yourself so unhappy : you shall not want a home if I can help it.” And then she went on to tell her of the offer she had that very day received, and how she had determined, with her consent, to accept it.

“And then you know,” she added, “you can still live with us : I am sure he will allow it, and you will be near aunt Lucy, and we might all be so happy.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, child,” exclaimed Lady Cairne, impatiently. “Do you suppose I should ever consent to

your marrying a mere farmer like that ; you that might have been Lady Alliston ! Oh, its too too bad ! ”

“ But as that can never be now, mother dear, it’s no use thinking about it. Inverallan is a gentleman, as you know, though he *is* a ‘farmer :’ and I am sure he loves me,” she added, musingly.

“ And that house too,” pursued her ladyship, unheeding her ; “ what would that be after Alliston ! ”

“ Why it would be *home*,” returned Laura, warmly : “ and that is everything. Besides it is a dear, old-fashioned place : I know I could soon make the rooms look lovely.”

A sudden thought seemed to strike Lady Cairne.

“ Yes,” she exclaimed hurriedly, “ I will give my consent : you shall accept him, and as soon as you like, too. Thank goodness this letter did not come sooner : I can write to Evelyn this very day.”

That letter was, as we have before stated, “ characteristic.” It ran as follows :—

“ It was singular, my dear Evelyn, that I should have received your letter to-day, when I was just on the point of writing to tell you that we could no longer continue to make Alliston our home. My dear Laura has received an offer of marriage from an opulent land-owner residing on a neighbouring estate (‘ Inverallan ’), and he is most anxious to make her, as soon as possible, the mistress of his charming home. I have for some time anticipated this : in fact, it has long been the dearest wish of my heart ; and as they will not hear of my leaving them, Inverallan will be my principal home henceforth. And now I wish I could congratulate you as sincerely as I do myself. I fear you have been grossly deceived in the object of your choice. She is

not fitted, either by position or education (birth I cannot add of course, as she is a Leslie), to be a suitable wife for you. How you can have been drawn into this is to me inconceivable. I trust that you will not have to repent for life the unwise step you have taken," etc., etc.

"I sincerely trust not," laughed Sir Evelyn, in great amusement, as he finished the perusal of this amiable epistle and handed it to Mabel Eversley, whom he had overtaken in a walk, just as his groom rode up from Overstone with the afternoon letters.

"Oh, capital : delicious!" she exclaimed, as she read it. "How exactly like that dear spiteful old lady. Do let me show it to mamma!" and she ran on to her mother, who was a little in advance.

"I am glad Lady Cairne appears so satisfied," said Mrs. Eversley, with a smile, as she returned the letter to Sir Evelyn ; "though I hardly suppose she deceives anyone except herself."

By the same post came a few hearty lines from Laura, sincerely congratulating her cousin, and telling him of her own happiness ; to which it need not be said she received a warm reply.

Sir Evelyn was very busy now making various preparations for the reception of his bride. He had chosen his mother's favourite room as a special "sanctum" for her, and had it refurnished with the utmost care and taste. When it was completed, with its delicate draperies and costly pictures, and all its perfect appointments, it satisfied even him !

The wedding was to take place upon a Thursday. On the Monday preceding he went down to the Towers. It so happened that he had been obliged to leave the time of his coming uncertain, so that when he arrived

he found no one exactly expecting him: they had all gone to dress for dinner. He finished his own toilet and then went into the drawing-room, which, however, was still empty.

What instinct was it that caused little May to come down that evening as soon as she was ready, instead of waiting for one of the girls as she usually did? But at the sight of that well-known figure in one of the windows she stopped, and came in so noiselessly that she was at his side before he was aware of it, announcing her presence by the very lightest possible touch of a hand on his arm. He turned instantly; and it need not be said that her greeting was returned in very different fashion. But then he held her off to look at her again.

“Why, May, my little white rosebud, what have they been doing to you? I feel as if I hardly knew you again!”

Yes: there certainly had come a change hard to define, but very perceptible. Lady Rythesdale, with her usual thought, had provided her with all that was necessary for her new position; and now the pale blue silk, pearls, and lace set off to perfection the delicate fairness of neck and shoulders, while her beautiful hair was stylishly, yet tastefully, arranged. Altogether she looked as if she might bear comparison with the highest in the land: as if she were worthy of being even Sir Evelyn's bride!

“Oh, I forgot you didn't know!” she exclaimed, raising her glad little head, and looking up at him. “You haven't seen me since Lady Rythesdale took me in hand; but she says it is all for you, so you may disapprove as much as you like.”

"Disapprove! I should be a severe critic to venture upon that; though I'm not at all sure that I don't like you in your own old way best. But look here, 'ma belle,' there is only one addition I could suggest,"—and as he spoke he stooped down and clasped a costly bracelet on her arm.

Before she had time to say a word, Lady Ida and several of her young friends entered the drawing-room. Sir Evelyn was instantly overwhelmed with inquiries and congratulations, and soon the whole large party was assembled. How popular he seemed. How proud May felt of him as he moved about among them: himself in her eyes by far the most distinguished-looking of all those titled guests! And for herself, all she cared for was to please him,—to try in some measure to fill worthily the position in which his love had placed her. Little did she suspect how she succeeded that night. He watched her half-shy yet graceful manner, as one after another came up and made demands on her attention. Several of the gentlemen seemed irresistibly fascinated. Their undisguised admiration might have tried anything less unapproachable than her perfect yet exquisite simplicity. As it was, an approving glance from his eye, a word from his lips, was worth more to her than all the adoring flatteries in the world! They found themselves alone for a minute in the conservatory just at the end of the evening.

"My darling!" he whispered, passing his hand caressingly over the fair young brow: "surely some fairy has been at work to-night! I had no idea my little mouse could talk so well and brilliantly; and I was not the only one who thought so, I assure you."

She looked up with wistful glistening eyes.

"I didn't care for anything but to please you. I am only glad if you were satisfied."

He certainly was satisfied, if his caress meant anything. And May departed with a very light heart indeed.

The house was quite full now. All the bridesmaids, with their respective cavaliers, were there; for Lady Rythesdale had planned a full week of enjoyment for all. The two Lady Liscombes, of course; Mabel Eversley; two Miss Cavendishes, distant cousins of Sir Evelyn's; and Rose Merton, the Rector's little daughter, a lovely child of ten, and a great pet at the Towers. *Her* groomsman was to be Arthur Fullerton; who, by Evelyn's special invitation, had accompanied Mr. Lindsay.

It was difficult to recognise in that bright happy-looking boy, the timid frightened child of long ago. His joy at seeing Sir Evelyn again was quite touching, mingled as it was with the sweet memories of his beloved little friend Willy. They had never met since his death; for he had been away with Mr. Lindsay all the summer, and had only lately returned.

The morning after his arrival he softly opened the library door, expecting to find his uncle; but there was only Sir Evelyn reading the newspaper.

"I beg your pardon," he said, half-retreating again. "I thought uncle George was here: at least he said he should be."

"He has just gone with Liscombe and some of the others to look at the horses. But come in, I want to see you: I haven't had a word with you yet."

He threw down his newspaper as he spoke; and Arthur, with pleased alacrity, came to his side.

"I must have a good look at you," said Sir Evelyn, "to be quite sure that it *is* you and no one else. I never saw such a change in my life!"

Arthur laughed brightly.

"Yes: I sometimes can hardly fancy I am the same. It is all different now; and uncle George is always so kind to me. I always think," he added, timidly, "that I owe it all to you."

"Nay: hardly that," he replied, with a smile. "It was the fear of losing you that time that showed him how much he really loved you, though he might have seemed harsh sometimes."

"How well I remember all that! What should I have done without you then? Dr. Irvine often says it was you that saved my life. Oh, Sir Evelyn, I can never, never tell you," he added, impulsively, with filling eyes, "how I thank you for that, and all your kindness to me at Alliston too!"

"I know it," he answered, drawing him closer; "and your grateful love is the best reward I could have. But I think,—it seems to me that you are changed as well as your uncle, eh? Don't you feel that *you* are trying to be different too?"

"I hope so: I do try. But oh, it's all because—because of Willy!" and the tears overflowed now. "He was the first who ever talked to me and made me really want to be better."

"Ah, my boy," said Evelyn, in a changed voice, "you are not the only one who will have cause to thank God for ever for having known that beloved child. It was his gentle, consistent, happy life, that made me sure there must be a something in religion that I had never known of; and now," he added, musingly,—"now I

would not exchange what I have found for all the world could give me."

"I shall never have a friend like Willy again," sobbed Arthur. "Never, never! Oh, if I could only have had him a little longer!"

Just then footsteps were heard along the hall, and he darted off that his tears might not be seen.

"Do you know where Arthur is?" asked Mr. Lindsay, as he entered. "I told him to come to me here."

"He has just gone away. He has been talking a little about Willy, and it was too much for him; so he ran off when he heard some one coming. He did not know who it was."

"Poor child: I am not surprised. You've no idea how he felt his death: for days I could not comfort him. He keeps that little book of his always about him, and sleeps with it under his pillow, I believe."

"I did not know there was such an attachment between them," said Sir Evelyn, thoughtfully. "But he has just been telling me that it was through my dear little brother that he first began to wish to be different. And he *is* different, Lindsay: I think I never saw such a change. He has been talking of you, too," he added, with a smile.

"Has he?" said Mr. Lindsay, with a pleased look. "Poor little lad! Well he has taught me a lesson; for it was more my fault than his that he used to be what he was; I believe I frightened him into it. But now his affection for me is quite extraordinary; he seems to forget the past much more easily than I can: at any rate I have found out that love, not fear, is the secret of managing a child."

At that moment the door opened, and Lord Rythesdale, with one or two other gentlemen, came in.

"Evelyn, what do you say to a ride this afternoon?" he asked, with a sly glance at one of his friends behind him.

"Thank you," replied Sir Evelyn, looking rather conscious. "But who are going?"

"I knew you would ask that," laughed the Earl. "Well you can ask who you like: there are three ladies' horses at your disposal."

Sir Evelyn left the room, and presently came back, saying that Lily Cavendish, Mabel and May would be delighted to go.

"Very well, then you must settle among yourselves who the rest are to be. I shall have to be one of course," he added laughingly to Evelyn as he left the room; "to take care of you all."

Sir Evelyn was rather struck with Mr. Lindsay's evident anxiety to be one of the party; he had not known that he cared so much for riding before.

As he stood by May's horse, after she had mounted, arranging her habit, he could not help reminding her somewhat mischievously of another ride they had once taken in company.

"I know I made a discovery that day," he said, gravely, as he placed the reins in her hand. "What do you remember about it?"

The colour deepened beautifully, as she bent a look on him that was a sufficient answer to any reasonable man.

And then the cavalcade set off. It was singular how often Mabel Eversley found Mr. Lindsay at her side, and how much she enjoyed that ride! Hitherto she

had always declared that she disliked, almost hated him ; but now she began to fancy she might have been mistaken. When they returned, croquet was going on, and Evelyn noticed the way in which Arthur came instantly to Mr. Lindsay's side, to tell him how they were playing, and the ready interest he showed as he listened to him.

There was music and singing in the evening. May, at Evelyn's special desire, gave them that well-remembered song of long ago.

"I never heard that little witch of yours sing before," remarked Lord Rythesdale to his nephew afterwards. "Upon my word it was almost too much for me : I never thought I should have been so nearly upset by a song again."

Another and another she was made to sing, till at last Sir Evelyn fairly took her off under his arm, saying he would not let her sing another note, they had had quite treat enough for one night !

"Selfish tyrant !" exclaimed Lady Ida, merrily ; "when you know after to-day you will have the benefit all to yourself !"

"I hope not," he replied, with a laughing bow at her, as he stepped out of the open window with May, for a farewell stroll.

"I don't intend to keep my wife quite such a close prisoner as you seem to imply ; though you, at least, don't deserve to be one of the favoured ones."

After to day ! Yes, so it was : for this was Wednesday.

CHAPTER XXI.

“They tell me, gentle maiden, that they deck thee for a bride ;
That the wreath is woven for thy brow, and thy bridegroom at
thy side.
Oh, may the love that wins thee, like a spirit of the air,
Be o'er thee at that moment as a blessing and a prayer !”

BRIGHT and beautiful rose the morning. The whole house was early astir. It was with a strange, half-shrinking feeling that little May awoke to the consciousness that it was the dawn of her wedding day ! How she wished the next few hours were over. She knew she should not see Evelyn again till he met her in church ; for, in true orthodox fashion, he had slept at the Rectory the night before. His very presence always seemed to give her courage.

She was lying awake, thinking of many things : wondering if her own sweet mother could see her now, —if she knew the change that day would make in the life of her child, when there came a gentle knock at the door, and Lady Rythesdale herself entered.

“I knew you would be awake,” she said, her loving kiss and instinctive womanly sympathy greatly reassuring the anxious little heart. Hardly, she thought, could her own mother have been more tender with her than she was then.

Mabel and Lady Ida were the only other two admitted before she was dressed and ready to go down. And

then,—with the sheen of the white satin, the rich veil that fell round her slender figure like a cloud, and, glistening over all, the splendid Alliston diamonds, Sir Evelyn's marriage gift,—a fairer vision was never seen than sweet May Leslie on her bridal day !

Carriage after carriage rolled away from the door, and at last Lord Rythesdale came to fetch the bride. Very gentle was his care of her. He saw how agitated she was, and felt the trembling of the hand that rested on his arm as he led her downstairs.

A dense crowd surrounded the church door, through which ran a murmur of involuntary admiration as she passed along on her flower-strewn way. The bridesmaids in their softly falling dresses followed her, two and two, up the church. Sir Evelyn was already at the altar rail: Lord Liscombe with him as his "best man." Dr. Merton and Mr. Randolph were waiting; and now May was conducted to her place, and the service began.

How the little heart was fluttering under those white robes ! Her words were scarcely audible, while his were firm and clear as ever. As he took the holy vows upon himself not one there but felt how fully those vows would be redeemed. Very worthy of all her love and allegiance he looked, standing there in the very prime of his youthful manhood ; and as she gave herself up to him, full well she seemed to know into how sure and safe a resting-place her great love was guiding her.

It was over at last. Sir Evelyn was the first to raise her veil and bestow the seal of their late compact on the trembling lips. Lady Rythesdale followed, and the other guests crowded round her with loving, heart-felt congratulations. The favours were distributed, the

registers signed, and Sir Evelyn walked proudly down the church with his bride upon his arm. Excitement had brought a brighter flush to her cheek. So exceedingly lovely she looked, in all the nameless surroundings and unconscious dignity of her new position, that a cheer, long, loud, and earnest, burst from the assembled throng as she passed on and entered the carriage.

For a few minutes after they returned to the house they were alone, and then little May was drawn into her husband's arms. She heard his low words of deep thanksgiving, and clinging to him as she had never done before, she laid on his lips the sweet response she had no words to give. The other guests now arrived rapidly, and soon came the grand ceremony of the breakfast: those two sitting side by side, the very centre and pride of that brilliant assembly!

A strange dreamy feeling seemed to come over her in the midst of it all, as if she could hardly yet realize the change that had come. But she was recalled by Sir Evelyn's words, as he returned thanks for the first toast. A sentence or two at the close caused the glistening eyes beside him to droop lower,—the fitful colour to deepen more. And then she had to leave to change her dress. When she came down again, the array awaiting her in the hall was rather formidable. For one moment she seemed to hesitate; but Sir Evelyn was standing at the foot of the stairs: it was on his arm that she passed through, many an earnest kiss and many a hearty hand clasp intercepting her on the way.

The carriage was at the door: the impatient horses tossing their heads and chafing at the delay. They entered, and amid a perfect hurricane of "old shoes"

and warm benedictions, Sir Evelyn and his bride drove away from the Towers.

“Well!” exclaimed Lord Rythesdale, as he re-entered the house, “if ever two people had a fair chance of earthly happiness before them, I should say those two have.”

The honeymoon was spent in Switzerland and Italy.

September was well on its way before they commenced their homeward journey. Alliston was all astir to receive them. As the carriage approached the park gates the horses were taken out and they were drawn in by the eager throng. How strange it seemed to May, as she entered that magnificent entrance hall, that this was home: her own home now! Standing by her husband's side, she bowed her acknowledgments to the delighted villagers outside; while he, in a few kind, simple words, conveyed on her behalf and his, their thanks for the honour that had been done them, expressing an earnest hope that they might long continue among them, to endeavour in some measure to prove themselves worthy of the loyal affection that had greeted their return.

When all was quiet again, and the crowd dispersed, Sir Evelyn took May off to show her her special domains, and then opened the door further down the corridor that led into the “sanctum:” his mother's room, that he had had such pleasure in adorning for his bride! Her extreme, almost childish delight, fully repaid him. Encircled by his arm she stood by the window, gazing out over the fair sunlit terraces and gardens.

“Oh, Evelyn,” she exclaimed, “isn't it lovely! How kind of you to let me have this room. I can hardly

fancy it is home, really, after all our wanderings," she added, looking up at him with happy eyes.

"Yes, my darling: home at last," he replied, kissing her; "and more like home to me than it has seemed for many a day. This is your own private retreat, you know, where no one shall invade you without permission. I hope, by the way, you'll sometimes extend that privilege to me,—just now and then, perhaps."

"It will always seem empty when you are not in it," she said, caressingly, as her head rested again on his shoulder; "and when it is, I shall have to come down into the study and invade *you*. Do you remember that day when you took me in there after the fishing rods, and how I admired it?"

"Perfectly," he answered, laughing. "I believe I gave you the 'freedom' of it on that occasion, so it is yours by old as well as new rights, you see. And now you must come with me for a minute and see Mrs. Humphreys: she will be expecting a visit the first thing."

Downstairs, and into the well-remembered house-keeper's room, May was forthwith conducted. There sat the old lady, radiant in white ribbons and new silk gown,—her master's wedding gift. Her joy, when he proudly presented to her his "wife," was indescribable. May kissed her affectionately, and told her how glad she was to have her there to help her in all her new duties. Fondly her gaze went from one to the other as they stood there before her.

"My children," she murmured, "God bless you both, and spare you long to be happy with each other. I thank Him that I have lived to see this day."

Somewhat curiously May felt as she took her place that night at the head of her husband's table. Well

she remembered the first time she had ever dined there, and Sir Evelyn's kind care of his little stranger guest. As she looked at him now, her heart thrilled silently with the thought,—that her home, her place henceforth was at his side for evermore.

What halcyon days were those that followed! May entered heart and soul into her new duties: Mrs. Humphreys being her right hand in everything. Many a talk she had with her in her cozy room. She was never weary of listening to her tales of old days, of Evelyn's boyhood, of his mother, and how things used to be: so anxious was she to do and be everything that her husband could possibly desire.

But he took care that she did not act upon this too vigorously. Tenderly he watched over his treasure: each day she seemed to become more and more the very sunshine of his life. Almost every afternoon they were out together, walking, riding, or driving in the beautiful little carriage, with its pair of prancing ponies that Sir Evelyn had bought on purpose for her; and which, under his tuition, she soon learned to drive herself.

Many a morning, too, found little May down at the village school, or in and out among the cottages. Soon the new Lady Alliston was as enthusiastically beloved as any of her predecessors had been. Every eye welcomed her approach, and every heart murmured its blessing on her bright young head.

CHAPTER XXII.

“ And years have passed away since then, and many a joy and care
Have filled by turns thy brother’s heart, in which thou hadst no
share :

But still within that heart he keeps one sacred spot for thee ;
And thine, beloved child, alone that spot shall ever be.

“ Full often when I kneel in prayer I thank my Saviour yet,
For all thy tender love to me, which I can ne’er forget ;
And when I pray for those I love still left on earth with me,
I ask my God to deal with them as gently as with thee.”

ONE evening, as May and her husband were sauntering about the garden together, they came through the shrubbery walk under the old lime tree. It was the first time that May had been that way, and as he drew her down to a seat beside him under the wide-spreading branches, she exclaimed, involuntarily,—

“ Oh, Evelyn, doesn’t it seem as if Willy must be near us now : this does remind me so of him !”

“ Yes,” he said, with a sigh ; “ this was his own special haunt ; many and many a time he has sat at my feet here, while I have been reading. Dear child !” he added, musingly : “ I love to think of him.”

A few minutes after, and they were standing together by a little grave. May’s tears fell fast as she gazed on that fair white stone, with its touching memorial ; flowers, bright and lovely, were blooming around it now, the sunset beams kissed the mossy turf,—all was so calm and still and peaceful, so exactly as the spot

should be where Willy slept. The hearts of each were too full to speak. Silently they stood for some time, and then the little shrubbery gate was softly opened and Johnny Cave appeared. He had been promoted to a regular place in the gardens now. He did not see them till he was quite close, and then was about to retire precipitately.

"Don't go away, Johnny," said his master, kindly. "What were you coming for?"

"I—I beg your pardon, Sir Evelyn," he said, in some confusion. "I didn't see you. But I come here every evening before I go home, just—just to see that it's all right, and water the flowers. Oh, I did love him so!" he exclaimed, bursting into tears; "and it's all I can do for him now."

The very sight of Sir Evelyn had so recalled Willy to his mind he could not help it.

Very kindly, as soon as he could trust himself, his master spoke to the poor boy; and as they went away Johnny looked lingeringly after them, his heart lightened at the thought that he had still those two to love and work for.

In a short time after this came the news of Laura's marriage; and in less than another week, to the astonishment of everyone, the announcement of Mabel Eversley's engagement to Mr. Lindsay.

People wondered how the bright, laughter-loving girl of twenty could choose such a grave, stern man, so much her senior too: but Mabel was right! He was changed indeed since we first remember him: she knew she might safely trust her happiness in his hands now, and never for one moment had she reason to repent her choice. Like a veritable bit of sunshine she came into

that once gloomy old house at Archester. It was the beginning of a yet brighter life to Arthur: a happier trio could nowhere be found.

And so the years passed on: and time flew lightly over the heads of Sir Evelyn and Lady Alliston.

Children fair and beautiful grew up around them. It was a sight to see Sir Evelyn in the midst of his noble dark-eyed boys, himself the very life and centre of all their joy and trust. And yet it seemed almost as if the place nearest to his heart was held by his one daughter, his little Muriel.

A fair and gentle child was she: her thoughtful eyes and golden hair reminding him, oh, how often, of another, still tenderly beloved, never forgotten!

Many a time she would leave her play to nestle lovingly in her father's arms, and at her strange earnest questions he would clasp her close, as if he feared she too might have to leave him! But she grew up beside them in her graceful beauty; his one little "maiden" among all his sons: her mother's sweet image and her father's joy.

And here perhaps we had better leave them, in the enjoyment of as much happiness as usually falls to the lot of any in this earthly life, gilded, too, by the bright enduring hope of "that which is to come."

If these pages lead but one who reads them to deal gently with the "little ones,"—if they point, however imperfectly, to the holy influences which even the youngest soldier of the cross may diffuse around his childish path,—not in vain will have been written the simple record of

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